Men-at-Arms

OSPREY PUBLISHING

Napoleon's Carabiniers

Ronald Pawly • Illustrated by Patrice Courcelle

RONALD PAWLY, born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1956 and still living and working in that city, is a respected member of several international societies for Napoleonic studies, and an expert on 19th century military portraiture. He is the author of the monumental *The Red Lancers: Anatomy of a Napoleonic Regiment* (Crowood Press, 1998), and of a study of Napoleonic veterans' tombs in Belgium. He has previously written several books in the Men-at-Arms series including MAA 355: *Wellington's Belgian Allies 1815*; MAA 371: *Wellington's Dutch Allies 1815*; MAA 378: *Napoleon's Guards of Honour*; MAA 389: *Napoleon's Red Lancers.*

PATRICE COURCELLE was born in northern France in 1950 and has been a professional illustrator for some 20 years. Entirely self-taught, he has illustrated many books and magazine articles for Continental publishers, and his work hangs in a number of public and private collections.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

- Origins of the Carabinier regiments
- Revolution, Consulate and Empire

1805–09: THE YEARS OF GLORY 6

- The 1805 campaign – Austerlitz
- The 1806–07 campaigns – Friedland
- The 1809 campaign
- 1810: Armour and new uniforms

1812: RUSSIA 15

- The advance – Smolensk
- Borodino – Moscow – Vinkovo
- The retreat – the Sacred Squadron – the Régiment Piquet

1813: GERMANY 23

- The Leipzig campaign
- 1813–14: Garrison service in Germany

1814–15 35

- The campaign of France
- The First Restoration
- The Hundred Days
- Table of regimental colonels

UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT 39

- The pre-1810 uniform: cap – coats – smallclothes – rank distinctions – belts & weapons – stable dress – riding mantle – horse furniture – officers' uniforms
- The 1810 uniform: helmet – cuirass – jacket – smallclothes – rank distinctions – weapons – riding mantle – horse furniture – officers' uniforms
- The 1812 Bardin modifications

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY 44

THE PLATES 45

INDEX 48

Men-at-Arms • 405

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

Napoleon's Carabiniers

Ronald Pawly • Illustrated by Patrice Courcelle
Series editor Martin Windrow

First published in 2005 by Osprey Publishing
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK
443 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016, USA

E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

© 2005 Osprey Publishing Ltd.

All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

ISBN 1 84176 709 3

Editor: Martin Windrow
Design: Alan Hamp
Index by Glyn Sutcliffe
Originated by The Electronic Page Company, Cwmbran, UK
Printed in China through World Print Ltd.

05 06 07 08 09 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

FOR A CATALOGUE OF ALL BOOKS PUBLISHED BY
OSPREY MILITARY AND AVIATION PLEASE CONTACT:
North America:
Osprey Direct
2427 Bond Street, University Park, IL 60466, USA
Email: **info@ospreydirectusa.com**

All other regions:
Osprey Direct UK
PO Box 140, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 2FA, UK
Email: **info@ospreydirect.co.uk**
www.ospreypublishing.com

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Patrice Courcelle,
33 avenue des Vallons, 1410 Waterloo, Belgium

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

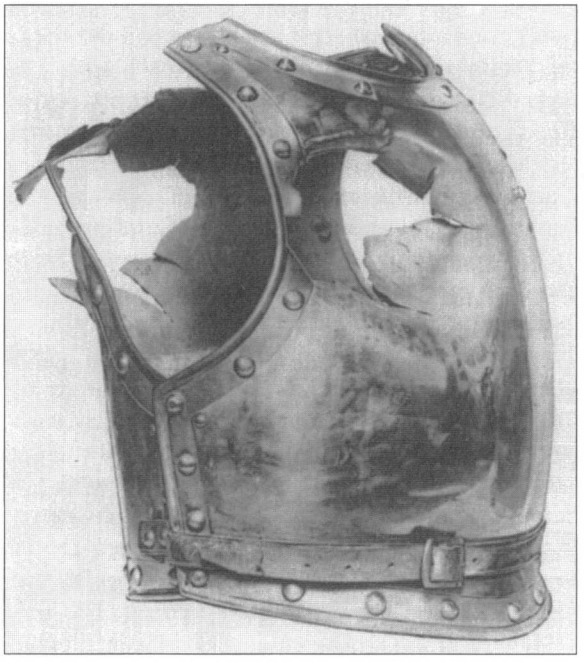
NAPOLEON'S CARABINIERS

INTRODUCTION

THE VISITOR TO THE Army Museum at Les Invalides, Paris, who walks into the room devoted to the 1815 campaign and the Restoration is confronted by a dramatic relic taken from the battlefield of Waterloo. In a display cabinet stands a handsome polished cuirass of brass-plated steel, expressing the martial glamour of Napoleon's army – except that a huge hole is punched through both breast and back plates, where a 6-pound cannonball smashed its way through the trooper's right chest and shoulder.

The sight of this ruined armour, now engraved with the date *'18 juin 1815'*, is extraordinarily moving, and the visitor cannot help but imagine the fate of the 23-year-old Carabinier Antoine François Fauveau, who wore it on that fatal Sunday. He rode with the 2nd Company, 4th Squadron of the 2nd Regiment of Carabiniers – one of only two regiments to wear these gleaming brass-faced cuirasses. Brigaded together, these elite units of the French heavy cavalry of the Line took part in the last desperate charge sent in vain by Marshal Ney against the stubborn British infantry squares. Fauveau's cuirass may stand as an eloquent symbol of despairing courage and sacrifice, and of the final downfall of Napoleon's empire.

When young Antoine Fauveau was torn from his saddle at Waterloo, Napoleon's Carabiniers had already been fighting on Europe's battlefields for 20 years; but their history goes back much further.



The cuirass worn by Carabinier Fauveau at Waterloo on 18 June 1815, and now displayed in Les Invalides – a vivid reminder of the limitations of body armour, and of the realities of Napoleonic warfare. (Photo: author's collection)

The origins of the Carabinier regiments

In the middle of the 16th century, the French commander Jean d'Albret adopted the Spanish fashion of arming some light mounted troops with a shorter version of the infantry's arquebus firearm. The use of this still rather novel weapon (in French, *carabine*) also gave these horsemen a new title: initially *carabins*, and later *carabiniers*. They preceded dragoons in the role of soldiers who travelled on horseback but could fight either mounted or dismounted.

Recognition of the potential of mounted troops armed in this way was followed by a period of experiments that showed a certain confusion over the best way to organize them for tactical effect. At first they were formed in regiments, but these units were disbanded by Louis XIV in 1679;

Trumpeter in full dress, 1791; two years after the outbreak of the French Revolution, King Louis XVI was still on the throne, and this uniform is still trimmed with red-on-white 'royal livery' braid (see Plate A), although the white-red-blue cockade has replaced the white royal cockade. Trumpeters were often very young; most came from the regimental *enfants de troupe* – the sons of serving soldiers. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

two carabiniers were then assigned to each light cavalry company, but in October 1691 they were reassembled into a single company within each regiment, which formed its vanguard. At the battle of Neerwinden on 29 July 1693, the carabinier companies were assembled into a single formation, and contributed so successfully to the outcome of the battle that on 1 November of that year Louis XIV decreed by royal ordnance the creation of the Carabiniers du Roi ('King's Carabineers') consisting of 100 companies each of 30 men. The command of the corps was given to Louis August de Bourbon, Duke of Maine and *'mestre de camp général'*. The 100 companies were divided into five 'brigades' each of regimental strength: four squadrons, each consisting of five 30-strong companies. The troopers were to be selected from the other cavalry regiments, and were paid higher wages; they were to be between 25 and 40 years of age, at least 1.73m (5ft 8in) tall, unmarried and of good character.

Neerwinden saw the birth of what was to become one of the finest cavalry corps in the French Army. The Carabiniers were present at Luzzara (1702), Turin (1706), Oudenaarde (1708), Malplaquet (1709), Denain (1712), Parma (1733), Guastalla (1734), Prague (1741), Dettingen (1743), Fontenoy (1745), and Lauffeld in 1747. During its existence the corps' exact title was changed several times: in 1758 the Carabiniers du Roi became the Carabiniers du Comte de Provence, and from 1774 onwards the Carabiniers de Monsieur, always with honorary commanders of royal blood ('Monsieur' was the traditional title of the king's younger brother).

In 1776 the five brigades of Carabiniers were abolished and the corps was reduced to a single regiment of eight squadrons, each with 145 troopers and five officers; the regimental staff numbered three senior officers, 15 junior officers and NCOs. Only three years later the Carabiniers were once again reorganized, this time into two brigades each of five squadrons, with a squadron strength of six officers and 156 rankers. In 1788 the corps was renamed the Brigade des Carabiniers de Monsieur, consisting of two regiments each of four squadrons. From then on both regiments would serve together as a single brigade and were more or less inseparable.

Revolution, Consulate and Empire

Following the French Revolution of 1789 the army's privileged royal corps were to be abolished; but King Louis XVI was still nominally on the throne until 1792, and the royalist Carabiniers, until then untouched in their privileges, sent Colonel Comte de Pradel to the Legislative Assembly to appeal for the traditions of the corps to be preserved intact. On 18 August 1790 the members of the assembly duly voted a new organization for the French cavalry that included the existing elite corps. The new decree renamed them 'Grenadiers des troupes à cheval' ('Grenadiers of

the Mounted Troops'), and fitted them out with red epaulettes and a tall bearskin cap with a front peak instead of their previous gold-trimmed hat. The new organization gave each of the two regiments two squadrons divided into two companies, with a regimental total of 28 officers, 492 troops and 420 horses.

During the Revolutionary period the Carabiniers were given seniority over the rest of the cavalry; however, the corps had not lost their royalist sentiments, and on more than one occasion they came into conflict with the Revolutionary authorities. During one of these incidents, while passing through Laon, Revolutionary soldiers made a show of removing the royalist inscription 'Vivat Rex Christianissimus' ('Long live the Most Christian King') from the Carabiniers' sword blades. What started as individual duels soon became full-scale battles, from which the Carabiniers always walked away as victors. Seeking revenge, Revolutionary soldiers and administrators demanded the abolition of the Carabiniers on the grounds that they were infested with aristocrats, but for some time no one dared to touch the officers of the corps.

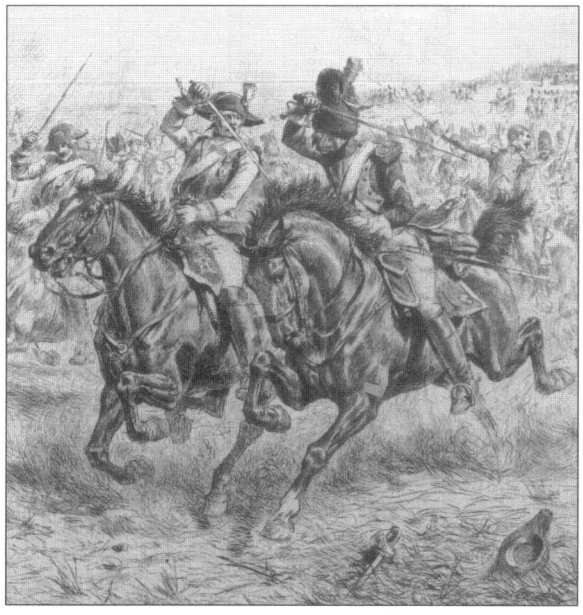
In early 1794, with the king executed and the most radical elements unchecked, all aristocrats were forced to leave the army. By then the 2nd Carabiniers were commanded by Col Jean de Bassignac, Comte d'Anglars, a veteran of the corps to which he had returned, after a long and distinguished career, in September 1792. Now, due to his noble birth, he had to cede his command; but his troopers thought differently. They marched to the building where the Republican representatives were gathering, and started shouting: 'No d'Anglars? No Carabiniers!' The representatives finally gave in to this clamour.

During the Revolutionary Wars of the 1790s the Carabiniers mainly fought with the armies defending the eastern borders of France against the Austro-Prussian armies and their allies. The armies in which they served and the battles at which they fought were: Valmy (1792) – Armée de la Moselle; Arlon (1793) – Armée du Nord; (1794) – Armée du Rhin; Frankenthal and Mannheim (1795) – Armée de la Moselle; Biberach (1796) – Armée du Rhin. Despite the turmoil of contradictory loyalties which bedevilled the French armies at this period, on more than one occasion the Carabiniers proved that they had not lost their former fighting capabilities. On 24 April 1794, at the battle of Villers-en-Cauche, the 1st Regiment charged the Austrian Latour Dragoons and inflicted such slaughter that they were given the nickname of 'the army's butchers'.

By the time Europe had been at war for more than a decade, all parties urgently needed a respite. In France a coup d'état, known as *'le 18 Brumaire'* (9 November 1799), had removed the unpopular Directory from power and installed the more stable Consulate. Negotiating from a favourable position, France signed a peace treaty with its Continental enemies at Lunéville on 9 February 1801, and with Great Britain at Amiens on 27 March of the following year. The new ruler of France, First Consul Gen Napoleon Bonaparte, took a particular interest in the Carabinier brigade; to win the loyalty of this still royalist-minded corps he distributed 'weapons of honour' to them in generous numbers, and appointed members of his family or close supporters of his regime to command the regiments.

In 1804, with the creation of the Empire, Napoleon reintroduced former royalist honorary appointments such as the ranks of marshal

A contemporary drawing from the Weiland Manuscript, showing a carabinier in full dress. He retains the white tasselled cords and flounder on his bearskin, rather than the red specified in the regulations. The waistcoat and breeches are shown as white; although they resemble gaiters here, he in fact wears the high boots of the heavy cavalry. The firearm is unidentifiable. (Author's collection)



Carabiniers charging Austrian cavalry at the battle of Hochstaedt, 19 June 1800, where they served in Gen Moreau's Army of the Rhine. Their bearskin caps and red epaulettes indicated the Carabiniers' status as the 'Grenadiers' of the Line cavalry. (Author's collection)

and colonel-general. An officer with the latter title was appointed to practically every arm in the Line cavalry: the Hussars (Gen Junot), Cuirassiers (Gen Gouvion Saint-Cyr), Dragoons (Gen Baraguay d'Hilliers) and Mounted Chasseurs (Gen Marmont), and Napoleon's younger brother Louis, the future King of Holland, received the honorary rank of Colonel-General to the Corps of Carabiniers.

During the ceremonies marking Napoleon's coronation the army was represented by small delegations from each regiment. While the former Consular Guard, now elevated to Imperial status, acted as escort to the newly crowned Emperor, the Carabiniers, quartered at Lunéville, were ordered by a special envoy to march towards Paris and to assist in the ceremonial. On 2 December 1804 eight Carabinier squadrons, led by Marshal Murat, opened the parade from the Tuileries to Notre Dame Cathedral and back. Three days later they were present at the distribution of the restyled imperial regimental banners or 'eagles' – a magnificent ceremony that would be preserved for posterity by the painter David, showing a dazzling Napoleonic ritual under a radiant sun (the reality was rather different, since it poured with rain on 5 December).

These ceremonial duties, carried out in close collaboration with the Imperial Guard, made the Carabiniers dream of becoming part of that most privileged corps. This was impossible, however, as the Guard already had the Mounted Grenadiers as its heavy cavalry component.

1805–09: THE YEARS OF GLORY

The 1805 campaign

Following the rupture of the Peace of Amiens on 16 May 1803, Napoleon – then still First Consul – had gathered his army near the English Channel and North Sea. Spread all along the coast from Brest to Hanover, it consisted of hard-bitten veterans of the wars in Italy, the Rhineland and Egypt. This 'Army of the Coasts of the Ocean' was intended to mount an invasion of England when the naval situation permitted, and meanwhile had all the time it needed to train and re-equip. The Carabiniers, mounted on superb black horses, were part of this army when the events of autumn 1805 sent them racing eastwards.

Sponsored and funded by Britain, the Third Coalition against France was formed in April 1805 by Austria, Russia, Sweden and some minor German states. Before it could mount active operations, however, Napoleon forestalled it. He began marching his troops out of the camps on the Channel coast on 31 August (and had thus abandoned the hope of invading Britain, well before it was finally destroyed by Nelson's naval victory at Trafalgar on 21 October). Ignorant of Napoleon's movements, an Austrian army under Gen Mack invaded Bavaria on 2 September, while another under Archduke Charles prepared to advance into Italy,

and Gen Kutuzov's Russians began to move westwards in support. Napoleon's stunningly rapid advance eastwards to meet them reached the Rhine on 26 September, and the Danube on 6 October. Forming part of Gen Nansouty's 1st Heavy Cavalry Division was Gen Piston's Carabinier brigade, the 1st Regt (Col Cochois) numbering 441 men and the 2nd (Col Morin) 407 men.

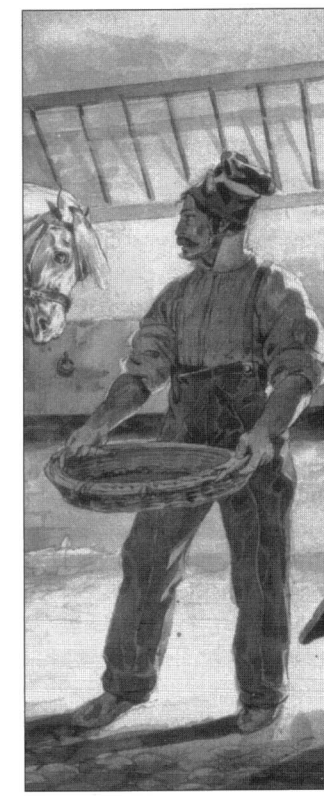
The Carabiniers saw virtually no action during the first stage of the advance. They fought their first engagement at Wertingen on 8 October 1805, and were present at Elchingen soon afterwards without taking part in the actual fighting of 14 October. Cut off at Ulm, the hapless Gen Mack surrendered. The Carabiniers then took part in the pursuit of the retreating Austrian corps of Prince Ferdinand, who was brought to battle on 19 October between Furth and Nuremberg. After fierce fighting the Austrians were forced to flee, leaving behind them their baggage and artillery. Colonel Cochois of the 1st Carabiniers was severely wounded by a pistol ball in this engagement, but otherwise the brigade suffered only 23 casualties, including a single trooper killed.

With the Austrians retreating once more the road to Vienna lay open, and on the evening of 13 November the Carabiniers marched through the Austrian capital. Napoleon then led his army about 70 miles north of Vienna, tempting Kutuzov's Austro-Russian army – with which both the Emperor of Austria and the Tsar of Russia were distractingly present – into an attempt to outflank him. The decisive battle which followed near Austerlitz on 2 December was Napoleon's tactical masterpiece; his perfectly timed assault split the enemy's centre and then destroyed their left wing.

Nansouty's cavalry division fought in the French centre left, between the villages of Jirshikowitz and Blaswitz. The Carabinier brigade charged so furiously that after a few minutes the enemy were thrown back towards their second line of defence, leaving their artillery to the victorious French troopers. General Nansouty, who charged at their head, told the Carabiniers after the engagement that he had never in his career seen such a fine charge. Nevertheless, despite the light battle casualties suffered by both regiments (two dead and 51 wounded), the end of this short and victorious campaign found the 1st and 2nd Regts reduced by sickness and straggling to strengths of only 205 and 181 men respectively.

With the Third Coalition destroyed in a few hours, the Treaty of Pressburg brought the war to an end on 26 December. In the aftermath of victory numerous promotions were decreed. Colonels Cochois and Morin were created commanders in the Legion of Honour, and the former was promoted *général de brigade*. To fill the consequent vacancy at the head of the 1st Carabiniers, Napoleon – in the best traditions of the *ancien régime* – found a new colonel among the members of his own family. His brother-in-law, the Italian-born Prince Camille Borghèse (husband to the Emperor's sister Pauline) received his commission on 27 December 1805. He had previously served as a squadron leader in the Mounted Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard; now, in order to help him meet his new responsibilities, Capt François Laroche of that regiment was assigned to assist him. However, the prince was more of a courtier than a soldier; he only arrived at his regiment in Germany on 24 September 1806, and was constantly searching for excuses to absent himself from his command.

Stable dress is, unsurprisingly, the order of dress least represented by artists. Géricault drew this trooper – who is not a carabinier, but gives us a good view of their typical appearance when wearing the fatigue cap and, in this case, campaign overalls. (Author's collection)



The 1806–07 campaigns

Before the regiments were able to return to France to enjoy the heroes' welcome which was being planned for the victorious Grande Armée, the Carabiniers began to notice new units and reinforcements arriving in Germany. During the second half of 1806 they became aware that a new campaign was imminent.

That summer the Emperor reorganized his cavalry. On 31 August he decreed that henceforth the Cuirassier and Carabinier regiments would consist of a staff and four squadrons of two companies each, totalling 820 soldiers and 830 horses. During wartime a fifth squadron, formed by taking men from the four squadrons, would serve as depot squadron. Not even a year later, however, on 10 March 1807, the depot squadron was created on a permanent basis. A regiment would now consist of a staff, and five squadrons of two companies each, totalling 1,040 all ranks – 41 officers with 59 horses, and 999 men with 994 horses.

The new call to arms came at the beginning of October 1806. Prussia and Saxony now joined Britain and Russia in a Fourth Coalition, aiming to drive the French armies out of Germany.

On 2 October the brigade started marching towards the Prussian army. Three days later Prince Borghèse rejoined his regiment at Bamberg; the next day he was presented to the 1st Carabiniers as their commander, and officially recognized as colonel by the officers and troopers. General Nansouty's division was now in Marshal Soult's Cavalry Corps, and the brigade was commanded by Gen Defrance. The Carabiniers did not play an important part in the battle of Jena on 14 October, nor in the later engagements of the campaign. Pursuing the beaten Prussians, they entered Berlin where, on 29 October, they paraded together with the Imperial Guard in front of the Emperor and his splendidly turned-out staff.

After this first stage of the campaign the Carabiniers found winter quarters on the right bank of the River Orzyc; but in January 1807 they were sent to Warsaw, where they arrived on the 31st of that month. On the same day Col Morin of the 2nd Regt was promoted *général de brigade* and replaced at the head of his regiment by Col Blancard, a former squadron leader of the Mounted Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. At Warsaw they learned by means of an imperial proclamation that a new campaign against the Russians had started; a Russian army under Gen Bennigsen had raided into Poland, and Napoleon was pursuing it.

Crossing the River Bug, the Carabiniers followed on the trail of the already advancing French army. After three days of almost continuous marching they were on the verge of rejoining the rest of the French army when Gen Nansouty's division was ordered to halt and to take quarters. Without knowing why they had been ordered to halt, they were not present at the butchery of Eylau on 8 February – an indecisive action which was fought in a snow blizzard and allowed Bennigsen to withdraw despite heavy losses on both sides.

New marching orders set the brigade on the road once again, crossing the hideous battlefield of Eylau on 10 February. Some minor engagements took place: on 16 February at Ostrolenka they charged the Russians with their usual élan, before the continuing appalling weather forced the French to bring the action to a close short of victory. Snow and cold forced both armies back into their winter quarters until

OPPOSITE **Carabinier in full dress, c1805, by the later 19th century artist Détaille. The red wool service chevron on his upper left sleeve indicates that he is already a veteran. It is interesting that Détaille shows the fur of the bearskin dressed to sweep upwards, and a carbine clip on the shoulder belt. Although the Carabiniers' main firearm is the subject of uncertainty, some early illustrations – e.g. a watercolour by Zix – do show this arrangement worn with the pre-1810 uniform. (Author's collection)**

the spring; but as soon as conditions allowed the movement of large numbers of men, horses, wagons and guns, the two armies would take to the field again.

Friedland

Even though Prince Borghèse showed no consideration for his troops, on 14 April 1807 the Emperor rewarded men of the brigade with eight crosses of the Legion of Honour. On 8 May, during a great review of the cavalry at Elbing, Napoleon noticed the imposing figure of SgtMaj Chambrotte – who had entered the Carabiniers as an *enfant de troupe* in 1773 – proudly wearing his cross. When Napoleon paused and asked the sergeant-major where he was from, the 43-year-old veteran replied, 'Sire, when I look at the squadron's standard, for me that is the steeple of my parish.' The surprised Emperor laughed, and asked his commander why this man had not been promoted to officer's rank. On hearing that it was because he could not read or write, the Emperor demanded, 'But aside from that, is he a good man or not?'; without waiting for the officer's answer, Chambrotte himself shouted, 'Certainly I am!' 'Good,' said the Emperor; 'I make you an officer.'

Prince Borghèse had not even managed to be at the head of his unit during this inspection parade at Elbing. Such a dereliction of duty could not pass unnoticed; six days later the imperial brother-in-law was promoted general and relieved, to be replaced in his command by Maj Laroche.

With the return of campaigning weather the opposing armies set out again in search of one another. On 9 June 1807 the Carabinier brigade saw action at Gutstadt, where the 2nd Regt lost one of its most brilliant officers, Squadron Leader Cardon. Five days later, Gen Bennigsen foolishly allowed his Russian army to be trapped with its back to the River Alle at Friedland. On 14 June the Carabinier regiments, commanded by Cols Laroche and Blancard respectively, again formed a brigade under Gen Defrance and served in Gen Nansouty's division of Marshal Soult's Cavalry Corps. Joseph Abbeel, a Belgian-born Carabinier of the 2nd Regt who had been conscripted in 1806, wrote in his memoirs:

'At 4 in the morning we left our bivouac. After passing through a forest we arrived in front of a plain that reached as far as the outskirts of Friedland. The Russians were drawn up in battle order on the plain. When the vanguard of our regiment marched onto the field, the German-born Trooper Smet of the 1st Company had his leg blown off by cannon fire. The regiment galloped forward and took position on the

plain. Facing the enemy and with an impressive immobility, we awaited the arrival of the infantry and other troops. The enemy continued shelling us, causing a number of casualties among our ranks.

'Several times we begged our colonel [Blancard] to charge. Without emotion, he replied that he would give the order when the time was ripe, at the same time forbidding us to "greet" the balls that we saw or heard coming towards us [i.e. the men were forbidden to duck or move under fire]. To set an example our colonel sat on his horse immobile, erect, head up and arms crossed... After waiting for a long time and losing many men, the order to charge was given. We could not have wished for more.'

The Carabinier brigade was on the French left wing, and it was Gen Nansouty's bizarre deployment that made them so vulnerable to the enemy gunfire: the brigade was ordered to take position at right angles to the Königsberg–Friedland road, with their flank close to the enemy artillery and their front towards the enemy cavalry. The brigade was heavily engaged from the outset and came under sustained artillery fire. The 1st Regt suffered severe casualties (12 officers and 104 troopers); the 2nd Regt, which made ten charges including several successful attacks against Russian infantry columns, helped Gen Grouchy to maintain his position on the Heinrischsdorf plain, though also at a heavy cost in lives. One of the casualties of the battle was the newly promoted S/Lt Chambrotte of the 1st Regiment.

Friedland destroyed Bennigsen's army; Napoleon reached Tilsit on the River Niemen on 19 June, and the Russians sued for peace. Famously, the Emperor met Tsar Alexander I and King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia on a large raft moored in the river; and the Peace of Tilsit, concluded by 9 July, confirmed Napoleon as the unchallenged master of most of Continental Europe, with only Britain left to defy him thanks to her mastery of the seas.

Trumpeter of the 2nd Carabiniers in campaign dress, 1806–08. In the early days of the Empire the favoured campaign uniform was this rather plain single-breasted *surtout*. Trumpeters wore reversed colours – a red coat with blue piping and turnbacks; white epaulettes and silver braid collar edging are the only 'fantasies' displayed here, and even the cords and tassels are removed from his bearskin. Trumpeters rode 'white' horses (greys) whenever available; like their special uniform distinctions, this was in order to make them instantly recognizable in battle, when their officers relied upon them to sound the calls that controlled the troopers. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

* * *

The Carabiniers were quartered near the River Pregel; from there they marched back westwards to Hanover, where they recovered and received replacements and remounts. The regiments now enjoyed a period of peace and rebuilding. By 15 December 1807 they already numbered: 1st Regt, 979 all ranks including 47 officers and 16 *enfants de troupe;* 2nd Regt, 1,007 all ranks including 43 officers and 15 *enfants de troupe.* Moving on 10 April 1808 from the fertile fields along the River Oder to the Duchy of Magdebourg on the right bank of the Elbe, the Carabiniers received on 1 May a ministerial instruction that in each regiment the number of horses was raised to 1,100; both regiments were now receiving new remounts of a fine local German breed.

Spain had already been cowed into acquiescence, and in December 1807 Gen Junot's French army marched from there to invade and occupy Portugal. In May 1808, Marshal Murat led

a much larger French army into Spain; the royal family were taken into exiled captivity, and Napoleon placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne, provoking the first of what became almost nationwide insurrections among the population.

July 1808 brought the French their first setback in Spain – and almost the only major victory by Spanish regular troops during the Peninsular War – when Gen Dupont was obliged to surrender his army at Baylen. The Emperor decided to take charge of the campaign in person; however, before leaving for the Iberian Peninsula Napoleon decided to safeguard his eastern frontiers by meeting Tsar Alexander I at Erfurt. The Carabiniers were called in to escort the Tsar and the Grand Duke Constantine during their journey to and from Erfurt. The Carabiniers' bearing, uniforms and mounts earned the admiration of both the royal brothers, who more than once invited the two colonels to their table.

After this escort duty the brigade returned to the Elbe, marching through Berlin on 1 November 1808 to stay the next day at Potsdam. With increasing numbers of troops marching off towards Spain, Marshal Davout, commanding the French troops in Germany, decreed that from 15 October onwards the Grande Armée would be renamed the Armée du Rhin, and as commander-in-chief he ordered a personal escort of half a squadron of Carabiniers, to be selected from among the squadrons of the brigade; the escorts would be rotated, each serving in immediate attendance on the marshal for 24 hours. The brigade left Berlin on 3 December, returning to Hanover to find new winter quarters.

Regimental Colonels of the Carabiniers

1st Regiment

18 July 1789 – 25 July 1791:
Viscount du Saillant, Marquis de Lasteyrie, commander of the Carabiniers de Monsieur
25 July 1791 – 5 February 1792:
Jean-Baptiste Cyrus Marie Adélaïde Timbrune, Marquis de Valence
5 February – 16 May 1792:
Jean Francois de Berruyer
16 May – 30 September 1792:
Louis Francois Antoine
30 September 1792 – 30 June 1793:
Jean Baget
10 June 1793 – 23 September 1795:
Jacques, Marquis de Jaucourt de la Tour
23 September 1795 – 4 September 1799:
Jean Pierre Girard
4 September 1799 – 24 December 1805:
Antoine Christophe Cauchois
24 December 1805 – 14 May 1807:
Camille Borghèse, Prince de Guastalla
14 May 1807 – 28 September 1813:
Francois Laroche
28 September 1813 – 19 May 1815:
Francois Charles, Chevalier de Baillencourt
From 19 May 1815:
Arnaud Rogé

2nd Regiment

18 July 1789:
Gabriel Henri, Comte de Bennes d'Orival, commissioned commander of 2nd Regiment of the Carabiniers de Monsieur; Louis, Comte de Foucault de Besse, led the regiment until 4 April 1792.
4 April – August 1792:
Charles Ignace, Chevalier (later Marquis) de Raincourt
August – 30 September 1792:
Louis Charles Antoine Beaufranchet d'Ayat
30 September 1792 – 29 July 1799:
Jean de Bassignac, Comte d'Anglars
29 July 1799 – 31 August 1803:
Louis Armand Auguste, Marquis de Caulaincourt, Duc de Vicence
31 August 1803 – 15 January 1807:
Pierre Nicolas Marin
23 January 1807 – 28 September 1813:
Aimable Guy Blancard
28 September 1813 – 19 April 1815:
Marie Louis Joseph Desève
19 April – 29 November 1815:
Francois Beugnat

The 1809 campaign

The Peace of Tilsit would prove as fragile as earlier treaties; hungry for revenge, the Austrians under Archduke Charles took advantage of Napoleon's absence with the majority of his army in Spain to cross the Bavarian border in early April 1809. The Carabiniers were still with the weak French forces in central and southern Germany; still led by Gen Defrance as the 1st Brigade of Gen Nansouty's heavy cavalry division, they formed part of Marshal Bessières' Reserve Cavalry. Counting seven squadrons in the 1st Regt and six in the 2nd, the brigade mustered with other forces around Ratisbonne, Ingolstadt and Augsburg. Napoleon returned from Spain to take charge of a threatening situation and, crossing the Danube, he divided the Austrian forces at the battle of Abensberg on 19–20 April.

Portraits of two officers of the 2nd Regt of Carabiniers, both showing the cap lines looped down and attached to the uniform. Sqn Ldr Hardouin Tarbé wears his sword belt over the right shoulder, a common custom before the new dress regulations of 1810. Lt Bassigny, depicted at the battle of Wagram in 1809, displays the newly acquired chin scales on his bearskin cap. (Author's collection)

The Emperor pursued Gen Hiller's Austrian left wing, inflicting on them a loss of some 10,000 men and 30 guns the next day at Landshut, where the Carabiniers made successful charges. They again distinguished themselves in front of Ratisbonne two days later, though at high cost. The 1st Regt lost one officer, 17 NCOs and troopers plus 137 horses killed – among them the brave and veteran regimental trumpet-major; 17 other soldiers were taken prisoner and 165 wounded, the majority of them seriously. The 2nd Regt had two officers and 20 men killed, plus a certain number of horses, and as in the 1st Carabiniers the number of wounded greatly exceeded these figures.

It has been said that as they passed Napoleon while returning from one of their charges, the Emperor noticed one Capt Paillau, who had lost his headdress and suffered a terrible sword slash, riding with part of his ruined face hanging down over his chest; supposedly Napoleon was so shocked by this sight that it would influence his future choice of the Carabiniers' modified equipment. This story cannot be verified, however, as a Capt Paillau is not to be found listed as a casualty at Ratisbonne.

On 10 May the French army appeared in front of Vienna; the Austrian capital was only defended by some 12,000 soldiers under the command of the young Archduke Maximilian, and after a brief bombardment the Austrian troops abandoned the city to the French. A capitulation was signed on 12 May, and the next day Napoleon took possession of Vienna for the second time.

Archduke Charles was still in the field on the north bank of the Danube, however, and a large part of the French army was still marching through France and Germany in order to join the Emperor. He determined to force the Danube crossing at the island of Lobau as soon as possible; and on 21 May 1809, with only about 22,000 men in his bridgehead, he faced some 100,000 Austrians in battle around the villages of Aspern and Essling.

On the first of two days of savage fighting both villages changed hands more than once amid scenes of horror. The next morning the battle was renewed and more French reinforcements arrived. The leading two brigades of Gen Nansouty's heavy cavalry division (Gen Doumerc's 2nd and Gen Saint-Germain's 3rd) had crossed the Danube bridges onto Lobau and the north bank, and on 22 May it was the turn of Gen Defrance's Carabiniers. Just as they were about to cross the bridge they were halted to allow a regiment of Mounted Chasseurs to cross ahead of them – when the Austrians, after several earlier attempts, finally succeeded in destroying the bridge. The French from the north bank retreated on to Lobau island, and the Carabiniers returned to the capital, where they pitched camp in a cemetery and were ordered to police the streets of Vienna.

Napoleon was determined not to repeat this rare defeat at the hands of the Austrians, and made his preparations carefully while reinforcements arrived from the Italian front. On the night of 4/5 July he again crossed the Danube, this time without opposition. Of the Carabiniers' arrival on Lobau – now christened the *'île Napoléon'* – Trooper Abbeel wrote: 'We halted just at the moment when the vanguards cleared the forest in front of us. We immediately pushed forwards through the forest, while the tops of the trees were being shot off by the enemy artillery. Arriving at a clearing, we noticed that the

Austrians had left us a wooden horse in front of which they had laid a bundle of hay; on the horse's side hung a cardboard sign with the words, "The French will beat the Austrians when this horse eats its hay". It made us all laugh, despite our critical position. Late at night we arrived on the battlefield nearby Enzersdorf and made our bivouac amidst dead bodies. We were unable to unsaddle our horses; I tried to sleep, using a corpse as a pillow.'

The huge and bloody battle of Wagram raged throughout 5 and 6 July. Archduke Charles's attempt to cut off the French bridgehead failed, and when Napoleon drove a wedge into his centre he was forced to retreat. The Carabiniers played a brilliant part in the successful outcome of the battle, but again at heavy cost: the 1st Regt lost 142 soldiers and 200 horses, and casualties in the 2nd were even higher.

Although the campaign had been won at a bloody price, it burnished their high reputation, and – in its early stages, before the Imperial Guard came up to join the army – the honour of providing the escort to the Emperor.

1810: Armour and new uniforms

Until this date the Carabiniers had been wearing a dark blue coat with red facings – a uniform that had barely changed in style since the late 18th century (see under 'Uniforms & Equipment', page 39). From 1791 onwards, when they were reorganized as 'Grenadiers of the Mounted Troops', their cuff flaps were the only distinction between the two regiments: those of the 1st were red with blue piping, those of the 2nd blue with red piping. A regulation of October 1801 specified the details of the bearskin cap. This busby was kept more or less stable on the head by fastening some kind of strap under the soldier's pigtail; but this was not effective, and soldiers often lost their headgear in battle.

One of the consequences of the 1809 campaign for the Carabiniers was the decree of 24 December that year that they should receive a whole new uniform. Witnessing the marvellous charges made by the brigade, the Emperor had noted the number of lost bearskins and consequently, of head wounds. His first order to reduce this type of injury was the introduction of chin scales; the Carabiniers had to wait until they were in Vienna before these could be ordered and fixed to the bearskins. At the same time long white cap lines began to appear, to prevent the bearskin getting lost even if it was knocked off.

Normally changes to a uniform were a slow process that took place due to changes in fashion, in order to make the outfit more elegant or more practical. It was not unknown for dress regulations to be issued retrospectively in order to standardize changes that had already taken place gradually over time. On this occasion, however, the Emperor ordered action without delay:

'Our two regiments of Carabiniers will be cuirassed. A style of cuirass and helmet are to be proposed which, while maintaining a difference between the Carabiniers and the Cuirassiers, will offer equal protection to the former. To this effect, as soon as the aforementioned regiments receive their cuirasses, their muskets will be withdrawn.'

It was not the first time that Napoleon had played with the idea of introducing more cuirasses into his army. After the battle of Eylau, where Marshal Murat charged the Russians at the head of 80 squadrons

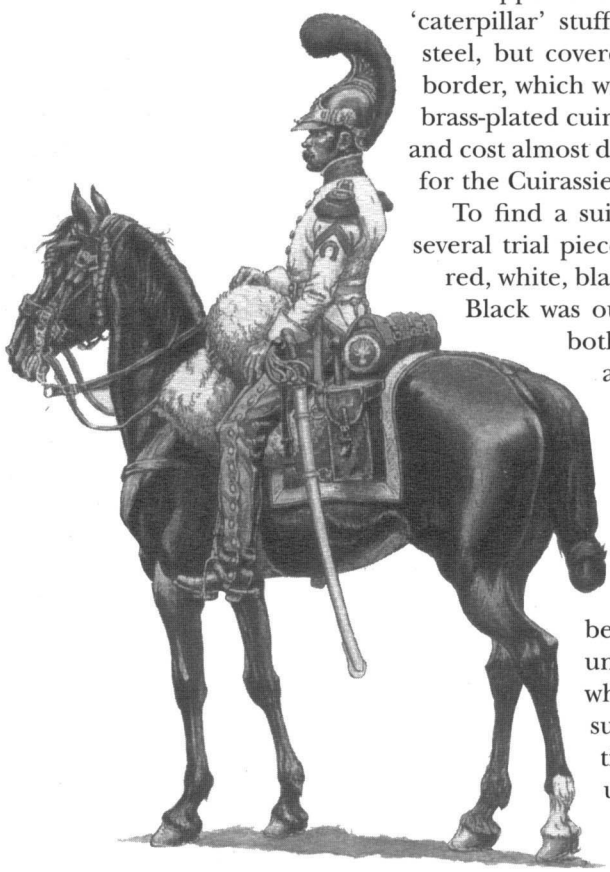
Carabinier of the 1st Regt, 1810–12, on guard in dismounted full dress with drawn sabre. Without his cuirass, this trooper shows the full dress white jacket with sky-blue facings piped white, and sky-blue piping and turnbacks; his cream-coloured sheep's leather breeches are confined by black infantry-style gaiters for dismounted duty. His white-edged ochre sabre belt is worn over the right shoulder. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

totalling some 10,000 men, the Emperor had been shocked by the enormous losses. Walking over the battlefield on the day after the action, and seeing the snow stained red with blood, he was heard saying 'What a massacre!'... He decided that all his generals and staff officers were in future to have the protection of a cuirass; he would set the example himself, and had fine quality helmets and cuirasses made for him and Marshal Berthier. Napoleon's armour was delivered at Tilsit in June 1807; when he tried it on in front of his staff the latter nearly burst out laughing at the sight – Napoleon did not have the build for body armour. The idea was soon forgotten and the cuirass stored away; the order to introduce cuirasses became applicable only to generals in command of heavy cavalry units.

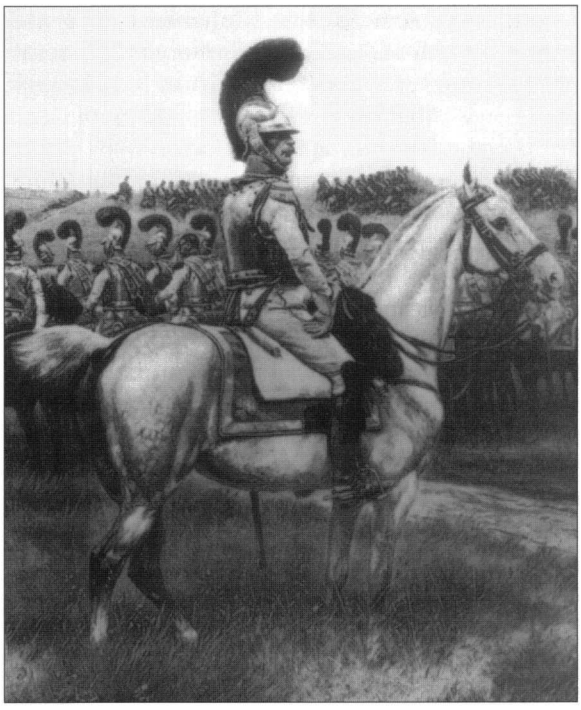
By the decree of Christmas Eve 1809 the Carabiniers underwent a transformation of uniform more complete than is often seen in military history. The Emperor knew that both regiments adored their traditional, austere dark blue and red uniforms and the bearskins which showed their elite 'grenadier' status. He knew that fitting them out with cuirasses would not be popular, so he thought it wise to change their whole appearance drastically all at once – this might help them accept these changes more willingly than merely issuing armour, which would have left them resembling the Cuirassiers even more closely.

Napoleon himself chose an 'Ancient Greek' style of brass helmet, with the frontal plate, chin scales and sunburst rosettes in white metal. The narrow comb, raised and placed well back on the skull for a classical appearance, was surmounted by a scarlet wool *chenille* or 'caterpillar' stuffed with horsehair. The cuirass was made from steel, but covered almost entirely with brass plate except for a border, which was left bare but embellished with brass studs. The brass-plated cuirass was much heavier than that of the Cuirassiers, and cost almost double the price (62.28 francs, against 34.01 francs for the Cuirassiers).

To find a suitable uniform to wear under the body armour, several trial pieces were presented for the Emperor's inspection; red, white, black, and even pike-blue uniforms were considered. Black was out of the question for the Minister of War; and both regimental colonels were against the idea of adopting pike-blue, which resembled the colour worn by the lowly troops of the Artillery Train. This left two possibilities – red or white; and the Minister of War Administration, Comte Lacuée de Cessac, made the final choice. The red was too expensive to produce, and for reasons of economy he chose the white, even though a project to uniform the infantry in white had been abandoned a few years earlier. The new uniform for the Carabiniers would consist of a white jacket with sky-blue facings – the latter colour supposedly chosen by the Empress. At the same time as the adoption of the new armour and uniform the Carabiniers were to hand in their muskets, but these would later be replaced by cavalry musketoons.



A farrier of the 1st Regt, 1811, in full dress jacket and grey campaign overalls, without cuirass; he rides at ease, with his chin scales tied above the peak of his helmet. His trade is indicated by the red horseshoe below the red length-of-service chevron on his sleeve; note also the thick leather tool box attached below his portmanteau. His sabre has a plain three-bar guard, curved blade and steel scabbard, but he retains the old black-and-red Carabinier sword knot. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)



An officer in the full dress order of the 1810 uniform watches his passing Carabiniers; this gives an idea of the imposing presence of the newly helmeted and armoured heavy cavalry. The officer's sky-blue shabraque has broad figured silver braid edging – see Plate F – and bearskin covers to the holsters. (Author's collection)

The Emperor's decree also discontinued the regimental fifth depot squadron, dispersing its men between the four service squadrons. Each regiment would now consist of four squadrons of 240 men and 200 horses, totalling 960 all ranks.

Despite the glamour of the new uniform, the proudly elitist Carabiniers were initially unhappy at the idea of losing their traditional blue and red, let alone acquiring the trouble and burden of a cuirass. The armour was thought to be a sign that they were to have the same status as the Cuirassiers, which was anathema to them; but nothing could alter Napoleon's decision and, given time, they became reconciled to the change. Impatient to receive the new uniforms, Lt d'Algay wrote to his parents on 28 March 1811 that the cuirasses and helmets had gradually started to arrive. 'It will make a fine costume,' wrote one NCO. 'Monsieur Nansouty, our general – or rather the father of our division – has promised us we shall be elite cuirassiers.'

1812: RUSSIA

With the exception of the cruel war on the Iberian Peninsula, 1810–11 was a period of relative peace in Europe; but the relationship between France and Russia was always uneasy. The spark that would ignite a renewed war between them was Russia's trade with Britain. The island nation's vital weapons, which allowed her to interfere with Napoleon's ambitions despite the lack of a large army on the Continent, were the great wealth created by her international maritime trade, and the navy that protected it. With the aim of crippling the British economy, which funded the coalitions formed against France, in 1806 the Emperor signed his famous Berlin decree forbidding all trade contacts with Britain and the exclusion of all British goods from Europe – the so-called 'Continental System'.

Napoleon clearly recognized Britain's implacable hostility towards his regime, and the fact that her river of gold could cause almost limitless mischief throughout his vassal states; he therefore took this policy of embargo very seriously. In 1806 he installed his brother Louis on the throne of Holland; only four years later he was so incensed by Louis' turning of a blind eye to trade with Britain – important to Dutch interests – that he annexed Holland and drove his brother into exile. (Strangely enough, the Emperor himself only used imported English soap, and the Empress Josephine sometimes had exotic plants sent to her by means of British ships.)

In 1810–11 Tsar Alexander took the same stance as the former King Louis, and allowed imports of British and British-carried goods via the Baltic states. His final renunciation of the Continental System enraged Napoleon, who issued orders throughout Europe to mobilize the

greatest army he had ever assembled. Starting in January 1812 and increasing steadily thereafter, French and allied troops from every corner of the Continent began to converge on the roads that led through Germany to Poland.

On Tuesday 3 March 1812, the Carabinier brigade crossed the Rhine at Wezel on their way towards Kassel. Arriving there after an 11-day march, they found new instructions to continue eastwards. In wretched weather they marched towards Leipzig and Kustrin, where they stayed for a week or two. During their stay each squad was given a cauldron, a large canteen, a scythe, a sickle and an axe, and every trooper received a small bag to carry biscuits or flour. The march soon continued, now in growing heat and choking dust. The roads, villages and cities were so packed with troops coming from every country in Europe that the Carabiniers were forced to take to the fields. Sometimes they had to double back on their route in order to find suitable quarters. Crossing the Vistula at Thorn on 2 June, the brigade marched towards Marienpol.

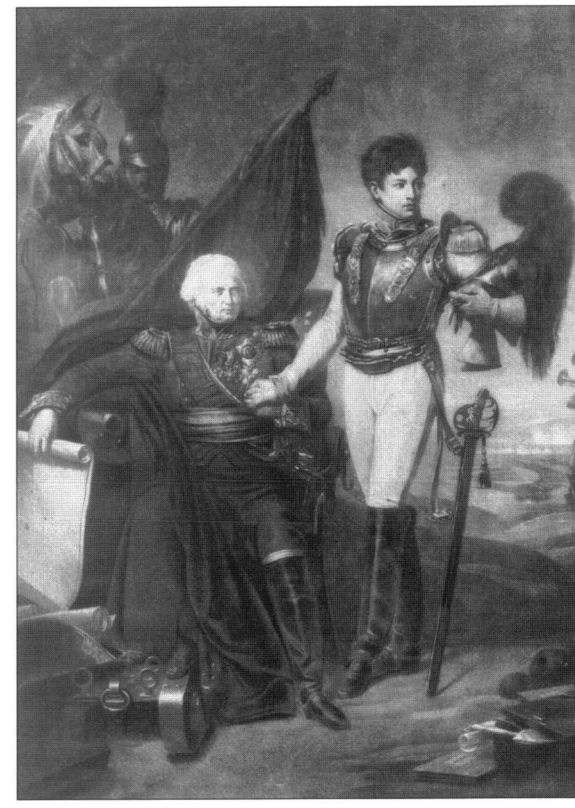
French heavy cavalry in Russia, 1812 – a drawing by the eye-witness Faber du Faur. The enormous losses of horses during the march into Russia forced the troopers to remount themselves as best they could from local breeds like the *konias* – small horses with long tails and manes, that lived in herds in the Russian forests. The Carabiniers and Cuirassiers looked ridiculous, with their feet and sabres almost scraping the ground. This Carabinier's shabraque is shown as distinctly non-regulation. (Author's collection)

There they joined up with the other regiments that were to form Gen Montbrun's 2nd Cavalry Corps. Napoleon's Grande Armée consisted of 11 all-arms army corps and four cavalry corps, the latter united as the 'Reserve Cavalry' and commanded by the flamboyant King of Naples, Marshal Joachim Murat. The 2nd Cavalry Corps was composed of the 2nd Light Cavalry Division (Gen Wathiez), and 2nd and 4th Heavy Cavalry Divisions (respectively, Gens Sébastiani and Defrance). The Carabinier brigade, part of Gen Sébastiani's division, was now commanded by Gen Chouard; the regimental colonels were Laroche and Blancard. On 1 July 1812 the brigade numbered 75 officers with 170 horses, 1,326 rankers with 1,192 horses, and an additional 11 draft horses.

On 24 June, after three and a half months on the march, they crossed the River Niemen and entered Polish Russia near Kovno. Murat's Reserve Cavalry always marched as the vanguard to the rest of the army, in weather that ranged from heavy thunderstorms to long periods of hot, dry conditions. The fields and barns had been stripped before their approach, and from the outset there was a shortage of proper fodder for Murat's tens of thousands of horses. These had not had the time to recover from the long months of preliminary marching across Europe and, suffering badly from neglect during the summer advance into Russia, they fell sick and died by the hundreds. Officers had spare mounts with them, but remounts were not available to the

troopers; the loss of horses at such a rate forced an increasing number of Carabiniers to follow the advance as best they could on foot. With no suitable shoes to replace their stiff, knee-high riding boots, this soon lamed and exhausted them, and they fell even further behind. Those who were lucky enough to find local horses, in a landscape swept clean by the ever-retreating Russian armies of anything which might serve the invader, mounted themselves on these small 'Konias', upon which the tall, heavily armoured Carabiniers looked ridiculous. Between crossing the Niemen in late June and early August the mounted strength of the Reserve Cavalry would be reduced by fully 50 per cent, without fighting a single significant action.

Marching from Kovno towards Vilna, they crossed the Dvina at Disna on 20 July. The cavalry, suffering terribly from the heat, was allowed to rest in what were considered 'cool' areas, and Montbrun's 2nd Corps stayed for two weeks at Nicolino and another week at Peribord. The lines of communication now stretched so far that the Emperor ordered the organization of five cavalry depots at Kovno, Minsk, Murecz, Glubokoe and Lepel; all stragglers and detachments that could not keep up with the march were to be sent to one of these depots, to be organized into temporary *escadrons de marche* before rejoining the main force.

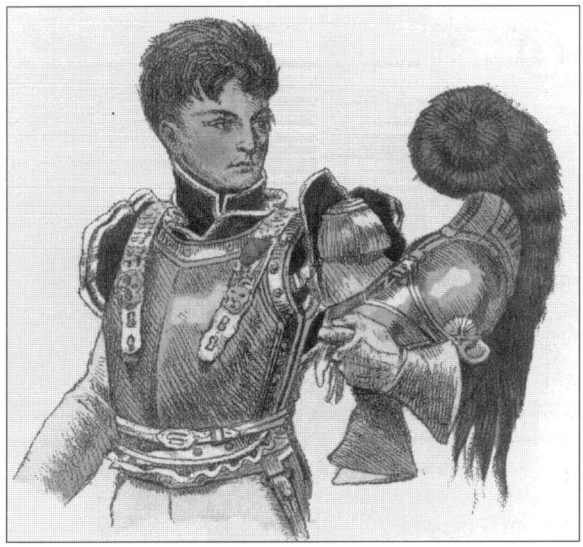


Gros's romantic painting of Lt de Lariboisière taking leave of his father before riding in the charge on the Grand Redoubt at Borodino which cost him his life. Ferdinand de Lariboisière wears full dress uniform with cuirass; among the non-regulation details are the red horsehair mane falling behind his helmet crest, and the absence of the officers' sunburst badge from his breastplate – the latter seems to have been removed, as the cuirass shows a hole or rivet where the 'star' was normally fixed. On the left an orderly stands waiting with his officer's horse; in the right background Carabinier trumpeters (who are shown in the uncropped picture to be wearing cuirasses, incidentally) sound the calls for the advance. (Author's collection)

The enemy's avoidance of battle and constant evasive retreats left Napoleon's army in ignorance of their movements and dispositions; he urgently needed a large-scale battle to inflict some real damage on the Russians, and to take enough prisoners to provide significant intelligence. At Smolensk in mid-August, when the retreating Russian armies united under Gen Barclay de Tolly, the Emperor hoped to achieve this at last. The Carabiniers were only spectators to these actions, remaining at some distance from the walled medieval city during the French assaults. After a stubborn resistance the Russians withdrew to the east bank of the River Dnieper, ready to retreat even deeper into the vastness of the steppes. The Carabinier brigade followed the French vanguards, and on 26–27 August lost some men and horses in actions at Dorogobuj against enemy rearguards; this was the brigade's first and only engagement against the Russians before early September.

Borodino/Moskowa

On 7 September 1812 the first major battle between the French and Russian armies took place on the plain of Borodino (coincidentally, part of the estates of the Russian general Prince Bagration); the French would name this action 'the Moskowa', after a little river that crossed the battlefield. Here, some 60 miles west of Moscow, the newly appointed Russian overall commander Gen Mikhail Kutuzov attempted to defend



A detailed drawing showing Lt Ferdinand de Lariboisière of the 1st Carabiniers. This clearly shows the absence of the breastplate badge; the mane at the rear of the helmet crest; the cross of the Legion of Honour attached to the cuirass left shoulder strap; and the dark blue cuirass lining, edged with double silver lace. It seems to have been a rule that regimental officers had two silver stripes and general officers a line of embroidered leaves. (Author's collection)

the capital, and each side would commit some 120,000 men. The Russian army was drawn up in a defensive front about 3 miles wide, between two roads from Smolensk to Moscow, masked to some extent by woods and streams and anchored on several field redoubts. The largest, on the Russian centre-right, was known as the Grand Redoubt, and was heavily fortified and armed – an eye-witness called it a 'volcano of firepower'. It was opposite this sector that Gen Montbrun's 2nd Cavalry Corps was deployed.

Drawn up on the battlefield awaiting orders, they came under heavy Russian artillery fire, and some veterans became angry at having to suffer these casualties without a chance to strike back. Sergeant-Major Ravat of the Carabiniers shouted out, 'Either we charge, or we leave the field!', to which his Capt du Barail replied, 'One more word and I'll break your gob, you miserable *Jean-Foutre!* [good-for-nothing]' The NCO held his peace, and a few minutes later the order to charge arrived.

After several vain attempts to take the Grand Redoubt the French now launched a renewed infantry attack supported by masses of cavalry, to sweep away the Russian infantry drawn up in strength around the field works. To cover the advance towards the strongpoint some 200 French guns bombarded it, reducing the redoubt itself to an unrecognizable wreck. The assault was launched at around noon to 1pm, under the command of Gen Auguste de Caulaincourt, and drawing in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Corps of the Reserve Cavalry.

The charge was made in traditional Napoleonic style: a massive frontal attack in straight and compact ranks, delivering shock after shock to the defenders. After walking forward half-way to the target, they would halt and check formations. On the order to advance, they would start at walking pace, increasing to a trot after half the distance, then accelerating again into the gallop, under constant shouted orders to *'Serrez!'* ('Close your ranks'). Only when they were within some 60 yards from the enemy would the order be given to increase speed to a full charge or 'triple gallop', finally reaching the momentum to storm into the ranks of Russian infantry, already shaken by cannon fire. For those unfortunates whose formations had been weakened and disrupted by the cannonade, the approach of the waves of cavalry must have been an incredibly frightening spectacle.

After enormous losses on both sides, the 'volcano of fire' from the Grand Redoubt finally fell silent. While the Carabinier brigade was rallying after the charge, Capt du Barail saw SgtMaj Ravat with Russian blood dripping from his sabre and soaking his right sleeve. 'Well, Captain,' Ravat shouted, 'am I still a miserable *Jean-Foutre*?'

Casualties were high, to judge by those recorded among the officers of the brigade. From the 1st Carabiniers, Capt Bailly and S/Lt Aubricourt were killed and Lt de Lariboisière would die of his wounds a few days later; Sqn Ldr Baillencourt, Capt d'Algay, Lts Goëtz, Vincenot and Mathieu and S/Lts La Rochejaquelin, Millet and Pyrr were wounded. In the 2nd Regt we find Sqn Ldr Berckheim and Lt Dejosé

listed as killed, and Col Blancard, Sqn Ldr Viel, Capt Benoit, Lt Prévôt-Sansac de Fouchimbert, and S/Lts d'Arbalestrier, Aublin and Langlois wounded. Carl Schell, a trumpeter in the 2nd Regt, wrote in his memoirs: 'After the roll call on 8 September, we became aware that 360 troopers and 17 officers were absent. My company lost all its officers; our sergeant-major led us in the battle.'

Among the senior ranks of the Grande Armée at Borodino, 12 French generals were killed including Napoleon's valued old comrade Gen de Caulaincourt. One less illustrious casualty became more famous than all the others, however, because of the record left for posterity by two famous French painters: Gros and Lejeune. Both paintings are testimonies to the glory of soldiers who are presented, in their gleaming brass cuirasses and classically shaped helmets, as resembling ancient Greek gods of war. Ferdinand de Lariboisière, son of the inspector general of the French artillery and a former page to the Emperor, had been commissioned *sous-lieutenant* in the 1st Company of the 1st Squadron in the 1st Regiment of Carabiniers on 9 November 1811. His mortal wounding at Borodino was represented in a painting by the soldier-artist Baron Lejeune. However, the posthumous portrait by Gros shows us a confident young officer turning his head towards the regimental trumpeters who are calling the brigade to charge, while bidding farewell to his father.

The story was that Gen Comte de Lariboisière had positioned himself facing the Grand Redoubt while the Carabinier brigade marched past to deploy for their charge; seeing his father, the 21-year-old lieutenant left the ranks to shake his hand. Only moments later the young officer was hit by a ball, and after the battle some soldiers of his company carried him to his father's tent. The Emperor's own surgeon, Alexandre Yvan, removed the bullet that same night, but Ferdinand died a few days later at Mojaisk. His father would survive the retreat from Moscow, but would die from exhaustion at Königsberg on 21 December 1812. Ferdinand was buried in Russia, and his father lies at the Invalides in Paris; but the hearts of both son and father were removed before burial, and are buried together at the family chapel of their chateau at Louvigné-du-Désert.

Another incident was recorded during the charge of the 1st Carabiniers: while they were overrunning Russian infantry Capt Macréau, following close behind the regiment, heard someone shouting his name and turned to see a wounded NCO trapped under his fallen horse. Riding back, Macréau recognized him as Sgt Bologuigny, a tall Italian, who was still holding the regimental eagle high. The captain could do nothing for Bologuigny except to rescue the regimental standard.

Despite appalling losses on both sides – some 40,000 Russian and 28,000 French casualties – the result was indecisive; Napoleon had shown little tactical flair, and perhaps the first signs of those inexplicable attacks of lethargy which would mark his later career. Kutusov continued to retreat; at 9am on the morning of 8 September, Gen Chouard's brigade recrossed the battlefield, where a heavy frost mercifully hid some of the horrors. Several officers were assigned to search the ground over which the brigade had charged in order to find any wounded Carabiniers who might survive.

On 10 September, the Carabiniers charged the Russian troops at Mojaisk, but they played little part in the other delaying actions which were fought by the Russian rearguards. On the afternoon of 14 September, Marshal Murat, at the head of the cavalry, finally entered a Moscow abandoned by the Russian army – and soon partly destroyed by the fires apparently started by Russian agents.

An uneasy armistice was agreed to allow negotiations; Napoleon expected the Tsar to sue for peace terms, but was disappointed. The Russians were confident of their long-term advantage; the Grande Armée enjoyed a brief glut while they emptied Moscow's storehouses, but the city could never feed and shelter such numbers during the coming winter. At the end of this period Murat's cavalry came under surprise attack at Vinkovo on 18 October. The King of Naples gathered Cuirassiers and Carabiniers and charged 10 or 12 times in order to restore the situation, and they eventually managed to destroy a full Russian division. Casualties were high, however; and one of them was Col Blancard of the 2nd Carabiniers, who could enter another wound on his service record.

Napoleon accepted that he would have to withdraw, and the army's retreat from Moscow began on 19 October 1812. On that same day urgently needed reinforcements for the Carabiniers arrived; during the whole retreat small detachments from the rear depots would come up to join the brigade as replacements, but as soon as they arrived they would disappear like snow in the sun.

A detail from Lejeune's Moskowa painting; Lejeune's pictures are always accounts of different events during a battle, united into single scenes. Here we see an even more romanticized vision of the wounded Lt de Lariboisière, carried from the battlefield by a few Carabiniers and greeted by his father. In this version of events Lejeune himself – an ADC of Marshal Berthier, in hussar uniform – brings him the cross of the Legion from the Emperor. In reality the young officer lay for hours on the battlefield until the end of the action allowed him to be found and brought to his father's tent. (Author's collection)

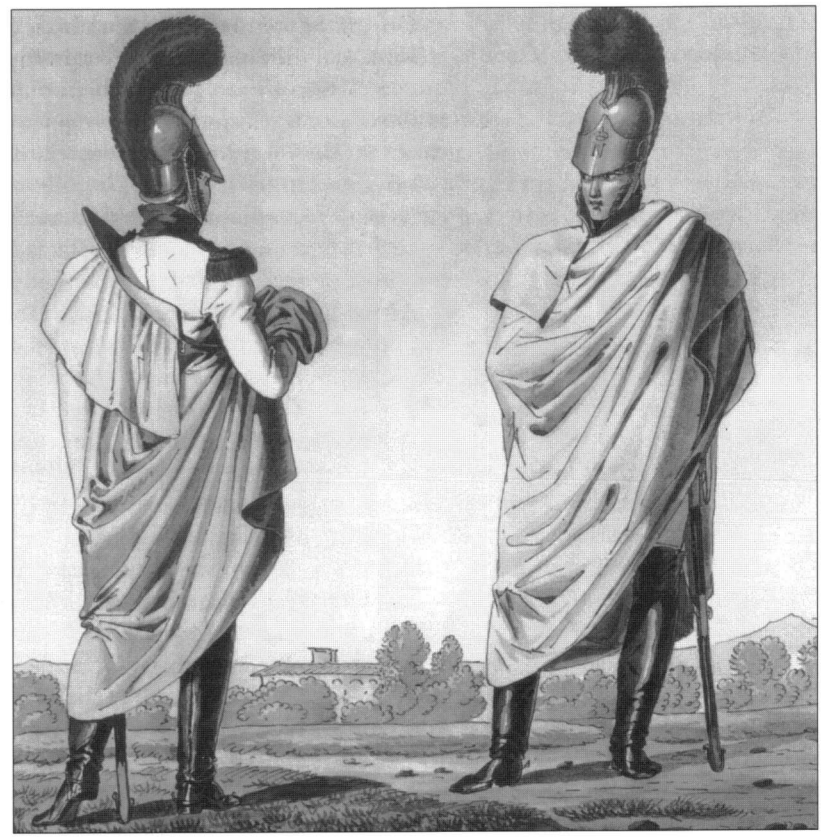
The retreat from Moscow

From the first days the retreat was conducted under conditions of serious disorder. Thousands of carts, carriages, and wagons crammed with useless booty slowed down the retreat over the bad roads. The logistic preparations were wholly inadequate, and with winter coming on Napoleon's usual insistence that his armies live off the country on the line of march was a mass sentence of death. Those who fell behind became the victims of the Cossack horsemen who constantly harried the columns; lucky stragglers were taken prisoner, but this was a privilege mainly reserved for officers – even if spared the lance-thrust or pistol bullet, troopers were stripped of anything considered valuable and simply left behind half naked in the snow and freezing wind.

Within a disintegrating army many units were soon reduced to their officers with just a few loyal men still gathered around their eagles. However, some regiments

managed to stay more or less intact and disciplined, though already greatly weakened in strength and losing more men with every mile they retreated. The best were those units with a strong regimental tradition, such as the Old Guard and the Carabiniers.

On 14 November, near Smolensk, the once proud Carabinier brigade numbered only some 200 well-mounted men, and these were incorporated into one of two *ad hoc* regiments formed from the remaining mounted heavy cavalry, under the command of Gen Latour-Maubourg. The unit in which the Carabiniers served soon became known as the Régiment Piquet; this managed to survive until the retreating army reached Kovno, where it ceased to exist through lack of men and horses. During its existence the last mounted men had rendered the necessary protection to the foot columns wherever they were able. The dismounted heavy troopers were gathered into a formation of between 6,000 and 7,000 men, marching at the head of the army as well as they could.



Two Carabiniers showing fashionable ways to wear the riding mantle when dismounted. This was quite inadequate in the extreme conditions of the Russian winter; cavalry boots, too, almost guaranteed frostbite, since they were too tight to fit any useful amount of insulating material inside. For the 1810 uniform the caped, sleeveless, generously cut cloak was made of a white/sky-blue mixed weave that appeared white at any distance. The regulations specified that it be lined on the collar and up the front edges in sky-blue, but here Vernet shows the lining as scarlet. He also paints the helmet plates in the same brass colour as the skull and peaks, with only the crowned 'N' in white metal. This was in accordance with the 1812 Bardin regulations, but was not always obeyed by the regiments. (After Vernet; author's collection)

Another unit created during the retreat was the 'Sacred Squadron'. At Bobr on 23 November the Emperor decided to gather all mounted officers into one large unit to serve as his bodyguard, and generals were ordered to assemble the remaining officers of their corps. The Escadron Sacré would be composed of four companies of 150 men each, drawn from the officers of the former four cavalry corps. The commander-in-chief was none other than Marshal Murat; the colonel was Gen Grouchy, former commander of the 3rd Cavalry Corps. Divisional generals served as captains, brigade generals as lieutenants, colonels were NCOs, and squadron leaders, captains and lieutenants served as simple troopers. The 1st Company was commanded by Gen Saint-Germain, the 2nd by Gen Sébastiani, the 3rd by Gen Lahoussaye and the 4th by the Saxon Gen Thielmann. However, the idea was never really embraced, and the unit never had more than about 300 officers. Volunteers for the squadron from the 1st Carabiniers were Col Laroche, Sqn Ldr Coiffier, AdjMaj Chautel, Capts Bryat, Macréau and Etienne, and Lts and S/Lts Varlier, Goetz, Bénard, Rivat, Lebon, Gerson, Millet, Per and Domjeux. From the 2nd Regt one finds the names of AdjMajs de l'Epinay and Dupart, Capt Midy, and Lts and S/Lts Crevaux, Dubarail, Despréaux, d'Argent, Doria, de Chabaux and de la Vieuville.

Following the army headquarters, the members of this squadron had to look after themselves in every respect, even finding forage for their horses. Most officers preferred to march with their few remaining loyal soldiers or in groups with their servants or orderlies; in this way it was easier to find food and to protect themselves against the ever-present Cossacks. (Three days after Napoleon abandoned his army and left for Paris on 5 December, the few remnants of the Sacred Squadron would be disbanded; the remaining officers were ordered to rejoin their units, but most of these had already ceased to exist.)

Arriving near the River Beresina, the Régiment Piquet helped protect the bridges during the first two days of the crossings. On the third day, 28 November, Gen Latour-Maubourg was leading the regiment towards one of the makeshift bridges to cross in their turn when several Russian squadrons suddenly charged, creating panic among the thousands of stragglers gathered on the east bank. Latour-Maubourg turned about and led his regiment towards the Russians, who instantly gave way. Taking up a position on the riverside plain between the Russians and the bridges, the heavy troopers continued to protect the retreat. This demonstration of discipline and fighting spirit attracted other mounted soldiers and officers who still had the will to fight (even some generals), and many now joined the Régiment Piquet.

After their heroic stand at the Beresina had allowed large numbers of men to escape certain captivity, the unit crossed the river themselves and followed the army. From now on the Régiment Piquet mainly provided flank protection, though their ranks dwindled day by day from frostbite, exhaustion and starvation. Finally reaching the Russo-Polish border near Kovno, they crossed the Niemen into friendly territory. General Latour-Maubourg expressed his gratitude to the remaining soldiers, allowing them to continue on their own or to return to their units. Nearly all the Carabiniers asked to continue escorting the general's sledge; but at Gumbinnen he took his final leave of the bare dozen remaining mounted Carabiniers, who then tried to find their brigade.

Once out of Russia at last, the survivors of this horrific retreat were dispersed to different places; the Carabiniers arrived at Königsberg to find orders to march to Elbing and then to Marienwerder, where they were allowed a week's rest. Being on friendly territory did not mean that their sufferings were at an end, however. Many of them died from exhaustion and typhoid. Another major cause was the change in diet; suddenly, after months on short rations, they arrived in well-provided towns, where overeating and drinking killed many of them.

Barely recognizable as Carabiniers, the survivors were from time to time confronted with their miserable condition when they saw well-dressed and superbly mounted Carabinier reinforcements arriving from Lunéville. While the men tried to find their respective units, those who were still mounted and fit were gathered into a provisional regiment, to serve under the Viceroy of Italy, Napoleon's able stepson Eugène, who was trying to hold off the advancing Russians and put down an uprising in Prussia. While his rag-tag army concentrated along the Elbe, the rest of the troops were sent to different depots in Germany or France. Here the pitiless arithmetic of the Russian campaign would finally be collated.

On 1 July 1812, the four squadrons of the 1st Regiment of Carabiniers fighting in Russia had numbered 41 officers and 860 troopers. On 18 October, on the eve of the retreat from Moscow, the 1st Regt numbered some 285 all ranks. Three months later, on 18 January 1813 – after having received several detachments of reinforcements – they numbered just five officers and 77 troopers. The 2nd Regt was no better off, as only a few survivors crossed back over the Niemen; one of these, Lt Lavieuville, who had saved the regimental eagle in Russia, was later to die – like so many others – after arriving safely at Königsberg on 22 December.

1813: GERMANY

Leaving the remnants of his army in Russia under the command of his brother-in-law Marshal Murat (he, too, would soon abandon his post, leaving the command to Eugène), the Emperor returned to Paris on Friday 18 December 1812. He faced the gigantic task of rebuilding his army from scrap, while threatened by a grand alliance of most of the nations of Europe. As early as June 1812, Britain had formed the Sixth Coalition with Spain, Portugal and Russia; after a brief neutrality Prussia joined in February 1813, soon followed by Sweden and various German states, and by Austria in August.

Decree after decree was issued to levy new troops; all regimental depots and arsenals became the focuses for gathering conscripts and material. On 13 January 1813 the Emperor decreed that the Carabinier brigade should raise a fifth (depot) squadron in each regiment. In fact the shortage of manpower and horseflesh was so chronic that the resurrection of these squadrons was more on paper than in reality – a problem shared by other units and formations up to the highest level.

By February 1813 the proud remnants of the Carabinier brigade had returned to their depot at Lunéville. The losses of the Russian campaign were more or less replaced in bare numbers; but the continuing lack of proper horses and trained men caused continuing problems in filling the ranks. Even by early July, the Carabiniers actually serving with the army would number only 122 men with 134 horses in the 1st Regt, and 140 men and 143 horses in the 2nd. General Bouvier des Eclats now commanded the rather nominal Carabinier 'brigade', which marched off to Magdebourg to rejoin the rest of Gen Sébastiani's cavalry corps.

In late April 1813, Napoleon believed that he had more or less sufficient troops to push the Allies back, and advanced to try to defeat their various forces in detail. He had about 200,000 mostly raw troops, plus another 68,000 from Eugène's Army of the Elbe. Victories were won by speedy manoeuvre, and were aided by the divided command on the Allied side. Lützen, Bautzen and Dresden became famous Napoleonic victories, but did not achieve the decisive results of an Austerlitz or a Friedland. Lack of French cavalry was one of the main causes, since this robbed Napoleon of intelligence on enemy movements and prevented him from exploiting his local successes. An armistice was signed between the belligerent powers, lasting from 4 June to 18 August 1813; all parties needed this pause, but in the end it would benefit the Allies more than the French.

Sergeant in barracks dress, 1810. His plain sky-blue single-breasted jacket displays his rank stripes on the forearms, and silver/scarlet intermixed epaulettes. His knee breeches are shown as cream colour, worn with white stockings and silver-buckled black shoes. He carries his white *bonnet de police* piped with sky-blue; here the illustrator shows the tassel as white instead of sky-blue. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

During those six weeks Napoleon concentrated on rebuilding his armies. Regimental depots were bursting with conscripts and thousands more were on the roads marching to join the field army; but they were mostly only patchily dressed and equipped and hastily trained, and the enormous losses in Russia had left the army chronically short of veteran NCOs and regimental officers. An army with a 'paper' strength of some 500,000 never approached that number in the field, and of those who did reach Napoleon about two-thirds were raw teenagers. Apart from the casualties in experienced men, the loss of hundreds of thousands of horses in Russia had left the four cavalry corps mere shadows of their former selves, and with the Allies pressing forward on several fronts the Empire's shrunken territory was hard pressed to provide the necessary remounts. More than one cavalry 'regiment' could in fact field only the strength of a single squadron.

According to the armistice terms, hostilities would reopen on 18 August 1813. The Allies had concentrated three major forces:

The Army of the North, with about 110,000 Prussians, Swedes, Russians and assorted Germans, commanded by the Crown Prince of Sweden – Napoleon's former marshal, Bernadotte.

The Army of Silesia, with some 110,000 Prussian and Russian troops under Gen Blücher.

The Army of Bohemia, with some 230,000 men under the Austrian Gen Schwarzenberg and the Russian Gen Barclay.

There was also a reserve of about 60,000 Russians under Gen Bennigsen in Poland, and another of around 30,000 Austrians guarding the River Inn.

Napoleon chose Görlitz as the pivot for his next campaign, and concentrated his reserve around this point between the River Katzbach and Dresden. With a front line that stretched from Hamburg to the Austrian border, the Emperor had to disperse his forces widely. In the north, Marshal Davout controlled the region around Hamburg, Gen Girard was at Magdebourg and Marshal Oudinot controlled Wittenberg. Generals Bertrand and Reynier were intended to take Berlin when hostilities reopened (although this was never achieved).

Facing Blücher, Napoleon concentrated Marshal Ney's and Gen Sébastiani's corps around Liegnitz, together with Marshal Macdonald's at Löwenberg, Marshal Marmont's at Bunzlau and Gen Lauriston's at Gründberg. The Polish Gen Poniatowski and Marshal Victor controlled the border with Bohemia. Generals Durosnel and Gouvion St-Cyr were at Dresden and in the Pirna-Königstein region, and Gen Vandamme's corps stood at Bautzen with Gen Latour-Maubourg's cavalry. During the 1813 campaign the Carabinier brigade served together with the 1st Cuirassiers in Gen Saint-Germain's 2nd Heavy Cavalry Division, part of Gen Sébastiani's 2nd Cavalry Corps with Marshal Macdonald's Army of the Bober.

(continued on page 33)

Sergeant-major standard-bearer of the 2nd Carabiniers in campaign dress, 1813–14. Here we see a blue single-breasted jacket without collar facing; more than one artist represents Carabiniers on campaign post-1809 in blue uniforms – an entirely plausible feature, given the speed with which the white uniform would get dirty. Normally a junior officer carried the regimental eagle, but sometimes, for lack of officers, a senior NCO had this dangerous honour. The regimental eagle is of the 1812 model; it would carry the battle honours ULM, AUSTERLITZ, IENA, EYLAU, FRIEDLAND, ECKMUHL and WAGRAM. We know that the eagle of the 2nd Regt returned from Russia in late 1812, thanks to the devotion of one Lt Lavieuville. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

1791–94

1: Carabinier

2: Trumpeter

3: Officer

REVOLUTIONARY WARS,1790s

1, 2 & 3: Carabiniers

CONSULATE & EMPIRE, 1804–05
1: Louis Bonaparte, Colonel-General of Carabiniers
2 & 3: Officers
4: Carabinier
2
4
3
1

C

THE EARLY EMPIRE,
1806–10

1: Officer in service dress

2: Trumpeter in parade dress

3: Carabinier in parade dress

CAMPAIGN DRESS,
1806–10

1: Officer

2: Trumpeter

3: Carabinier

PARADE DRESS, 1810–15

1: Field officer

2 & 3: Carabiniers

TRUMPETERS & DRUMMER, 1810–14

1: Trumpeter, 1810

2: Kettle drummer, 1810–14

3: Trumpeter, 1810–13

CAMPAIGN DRESS, 1813–15

1: Trumpeter

2: Carabinier

3: Officer

The Leipzig campaign

On 16 August 1813, 24 hours before the armistice officially ended, Blücher opened his offensive. This would prove to be a new type of campaign; this time the Allies avoided direct contact with the Emperor's main forces, and concentrated on beating his lieutenants. Each time they gained some success, they retreated in the face of Napoleon's consequent advance with his reserves, before manoeuvring to defeat another detached French corps.

Blücher's unexpected advance pushed the French troops backwards; Napoleon immediately responded, but the Army of Silesia retreated before him. By now Dresden was threatened by the Austrians from Bohemia, and Napoleon had to turn against this new threat, leaving Marshal Macdonald to deal with the Prussians. When Napoleon was engaged at Dresden, Blücher advanced again, defeating Macdonald on 26 August at Katzbach. This battle cost the French 10,000 killed, as many taken prisoner and about 100 guns, and won Blücher the rank of marshal and a princedom. After a 24-hour rout Macdonald was able to rally behind the River Bober; his defeat outweighed the gains of Napoleon's own victory at Dresden.

Napoleon manoeuvred vainly to bring the Allies to a decisive battle while his lieutenants were defeated one by one, but on 8 October his ally Bavaria changed sides. A week later the Emperor concentrated about 157,000 men and 900 guns around Leipzig, where he would fight 'the Battle of the Nations' (16–19 October) against the much larger forces of Blücher, Schwarzenburg and finally Bernadotte. The complex story of this battle is fully covered elsewhere; and although the Emperor managed to extract a large part of his army from encirclement his defeat was still crushing, and cost him his last ally, Saxony.[1]

At Leipzig, Gen Latour-Maubourg's 1st and Sebastiani's 2nd Cavalry Corps were placed south-east of the city facing the advance of Schwarzenberg, which Napoleon had intended to be the point of decision. The heavy cavalry were drawn up on the French centre-left, the 1st Corps behind the village of Liebertwolkwitz and the 2nd behind the woods between that village and the Kolmberg hill. Macdonald's XI Corps was some way behind their left flank, before Holzhausen. As the battle progressed this wing were driven in north-westwards, and by the morning of the 18th, Sebastiani's 4,800-odd troopers would be behind Macdonald's infantry divisions before the village of Stötteritz.

The Cuirassier officer S/Lt Rilliet wrote in his journal (published in 1908) that the 2nd Cavalry Corps was deployed in column of regiments, with the 1st Carabiniers in front and Gen Sébastiani with his staff off to their right. Suddenly a mass of enemy cavalry, mainly Hungarian hussars, charged down on the Carabiniers. The general waved his riding crop and exclaimed, 'Bravo! This will be charming – hussars charging Carabiniers!' But instead of accepting the challenge, which their armour, weapons and training should have fitted them to meet without difficulty, the 1st Carabiniers reportedly turned their horses and fell back. Far from restoring the situation, the 2nd Regt followed them, pulling the 1st Sqn of the 1st Cuirassiers with them. Only the last two Cuirassier squadrons kept formation and charged, supported by the advancing 2nd Bde of Gen Saint-Germain's division. Rilliet claims that

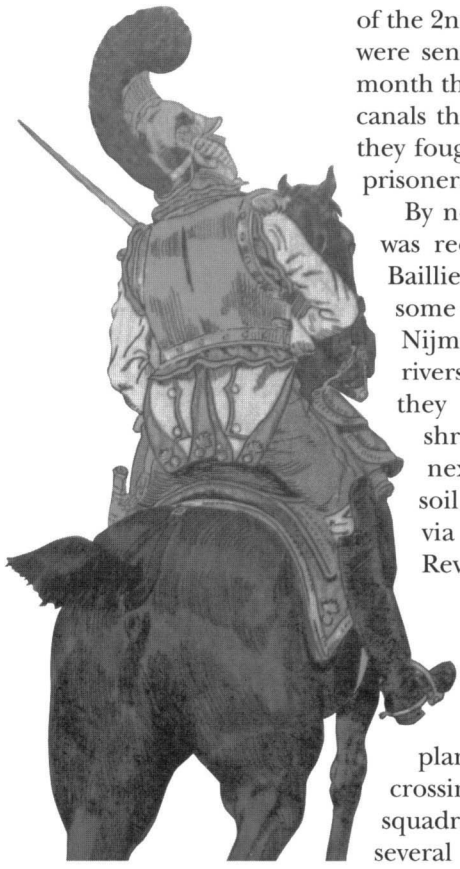
1 See Campaign 25, *Leipzig 1813*

at the end of the day the Carabiniers were refused quarters near to a Cuirassier bivouac, the latter suggesting that they go and find space in the lines of the Hungarian hussars instead.

The regiments were certainly full of inexperienced troopers, and it was only their second engagement during this campaign, which might explain a degree of panic when charged without warning. No other confirmation of Rilliet's account has been found, however, and rivalry between the two arms perhaps led to exaggeration of a minor incident, during a three-day battle in which the Carabiniers are said to have distinguished themselves several times. During one of the charges a Carabinier saved Gen Sébastiani's life by offering him his own horse when the general's was killed under him. Another trooper, Carabinier Gier, died a hero's death when surrounded by Russian hussars; he refused to surrender, and killed eight of them before falling under their swords.

In the aftermath to the defeat at Leipzig the French army, marching westward towards the French frontier, was confronted at Hanau on 30 October by 40,000 of the defected Bavarian troops under Gen Wrede. Expecting to block a demoralized army in full retreat, the Bavarians found that they were mistaken. Supported by a strong force of artillery, the Carabiniers and the cavalry of the Imperial Guard charged the Austro-Bavarian cavalry and crushed them. With the road to France cleared, the army – weakened by a typhoid outbreak – marched on to the border.

An impression of the rear view of the Carabinier uniform of 1810, by Job. (Author's collection)



After crossing the Rhine at Mainz on 2 November 1813, the remains of the 2nd Cavalry Corps were ordered to Koln. After a week or two they were sent to guard the Rhine near Nijmegen in Holland. Later that month they were sent to the Arnhem region, a country cut by rivers and canals that made any cavalry action impossible. Still, on 28 November they fought against a force of Prussian infantry, taking some hundred prisoners of war.

By now reduced to some 700 men, Gen Saint-Germain's division was reorganized into a provisional regiment commanded by Col Bailliencourt; the two Carabinier regiments together totalled only some 385 men. The turn of the year was spent near Cleves and Nijmegen, where they controlled the territory between the rivers Maas and Rhine; but under steady pressure from the Allies they retreated deeper and deeper towards the heart of the shrunken empire. Napoleon gathered all available forces for the next campaign, which would be his last ditch defence of French soil. The Carabiniers were recalled from Holland and marched via Venloo and Namur, back across the borders of pre-Revolutionary France.

1813–14: Garrison service in Germany

Large garrisons were left in Germany for rearguard actions, to interrupt Allied communications and keep forces tied down away from the frontier. One of these garrisons had been planted by Eugène in the fortified city of Magdeburg guarding a crossing of the Elbe. Trying to raise the strength of the field squadrons during the 1813 campaign, the regimental depots had sent several detachments of Carabiniers to Magdeburg, to be organized

with other detachments into provisional regiments; these were to join the main army in recapturing German and Polish territory.

The first detachment was one of 60 Carabiniers for the 1st Regt and 33 for the 2nd, all dismounted. Marching via Strasbourg, Mainz and Wesel, they arrived at Magdeburg on 6 August 1813, and were issued with the necessary horses. To this small detachment were added several Carabiniers still arriving from Russia and from hospitals. The Lunéville depot soon sent another two detachments, and with numbers rising two squadrons could be organized: one of the 1st Regt commanded by Capt Guillaume, and one of the 2nd led by Capt Forêt. Together these squadrons counted 16 officers, four sergeant-majors, four *fourriers* and sufficient corporals.

During the armistice of June–August 1813, Magdeburg became a centre for the concentration of troops, arms and ammunition. At the end of the armistice the Magdeburg garrison had been intended to make a sortie to join Marshal Oudinot's march towards Berlin, but in the event this expedition never happened, and Magdeburg's 25,000-strong garrison was soon under siege by Allied troops. The garrison remained active, however; they carried out several successful sorties to find cattle, fodder and food, and also in order to keep up the tension in the Allied camp and to ensure that more troops were tied down by the siege.

On 14 April 1814 news reached the city that the Emperor had abdicated. On 23 April an armistice was signed, and Magdeburg was handed over to the Allies on 19 May. General Le Marois, military governor of the city and ADC to the Emperor, left for France with the remains of the garrison – some 14,000 men and 54 guns.

Painting by Vernet of an officer in full dress but without cuirass, following the 1812 Bardin regulations (as so often, the gauntlet cuffs hide the jacket cuff details which are the only way to distinguish the 1st from the 2nd Regiment). It is interesting to see two saddles: the entirely blue one on the horse was probably for everyday use, and the silver-edged one (right) for full dress. In several paintings Vernet shows the pistol holster covers in cloth rather than in the usual bearskin. The red plume on the left of this helmet is also unusual. Before 1810 the junior officers wore red plumes on their bearskin caps, and senior officers white plumes; this might also have been the case after 1810, but we only know of white plumes for senior officers in full dress. (Author's collection)

1814–15

In 1814, reorganized yet again, the Carabinier brigade participated in the 'Campaign of France', now led by the former colonel of the 2nd Regt, Gen Blancard. The 1814 campaign was one of forced marches and counter-marches as Napoleon seemed to rediscover his old brilliance. With a small but very mobile army, he kept at bay for months the much stronger and converging armies of the Coalition; on occasion, indeed, he came close to decisive victories. The Carabiniers, still part of Gen Saint-Germain's heavy cavalry division, distinguished themselves at Brienne (31 January 1814), Aulnay (3 February), Vauchamps (14 February), Craonne (7 March), Laon (8 March), Arcis-sur-Aube (20 March), and on 25 March at Fère-Champenoise – all desperate battles fought against heavy odds. But the overwhelmingly superior numbers of the Allies forced the French troops away from

Paris; after a fierce but brief resistance the capital capitulated, and the first signs of defections from Napoleon's army – and from among his senior commanders – became apparent. The Emperor tried to abdicate in favour of his infant son at Fontainebleau on 6 April, but the Allies rejected this ploy and insisted on unconditional surrender. This was agreed on 11 April, and soon afterwards Napoleon took the road to the south and exile on the little Mediterranean island of Elba.

With the monarchy restored and peace returning to the European continent, the Carabiniers returned to their depot at Lunéville on 13 June 1814.

The First Restoration

Under the First Restoration the army was reduced to normal peacetime proportions. A royal ordnance of 12 May 1814 recognized the Carabiniers' honorary precedence in the Line cavalry, with two regiments each of four squadrons of two companies. The regimental staffs would consist of eight officers and 12 rankers with 23 horses, and each company would have four officers, 74 men and 63 horses; the regimental strength was thus 40 officers, 604 rankers and 527 horses.

The restoration of outward signs of the *ancien régime* saw the Carabinier brigade become Le Corps de Carabiniers de Monsieur, under the command of Maréchal-de-camp Comte d'Escars and the Comte d'Artois – King Louis XVIII's unpopular younger brother, who received the rank of honorary colonel by royal ordnance on 20 May 1814. On the evening of the following 30 October the Count of Artois, wearing Carabinier uniform, came to Lunéville for an inspection; the next day he had both regiments paraded in front of him, and on 1 November, the day before he left, he gathered both regiments on foot in the *manège* or riding school. There two long tables were set for the troopers and NCOs, crossed at the ends by another long table for the count, officers and guests of both regiments. After a distribution of decorations, the officers and men were invited to a luncheon presided over by their honorary colonel.

After drinking the health of the regiments, some members of the count's entourage, in the traditional manner, threw their emptied glasses to smash on the ground. At this, the Carabinier officers followed their example by drawing their long swords and smashing up the elaborately dressed tables. Bottles, plates, glasses and dishes flew through the air in fragments, to the considerable shock of the Comte d'Artois.

The next day the count left Lunéville with an escort of Carabiniers who followed him towards Nancy.

Shortly afterwards, Gen Pailhold distributed the new regimental standards which were to replace the old eagles. This was not the only imperial emblem that the army was ordered to discontinue by the new government. On 22 July 1814 new helmets were distributed to both Carabinier regiments, in the same style as previously but now without the white metal front plate showing the crowned cypher 'N'; instead the plate showed the honorary colonel's blazon of arms. When Napoleon escaped from Elba in March 1815 and returned to power, he found a fully equipped and full strength brigade who were eager to unscrew the Count of Artois' arms from their helmets. (Officers, who had to pay for their own equipment, probably still had their old imperial helmets.)

The Hundred Days

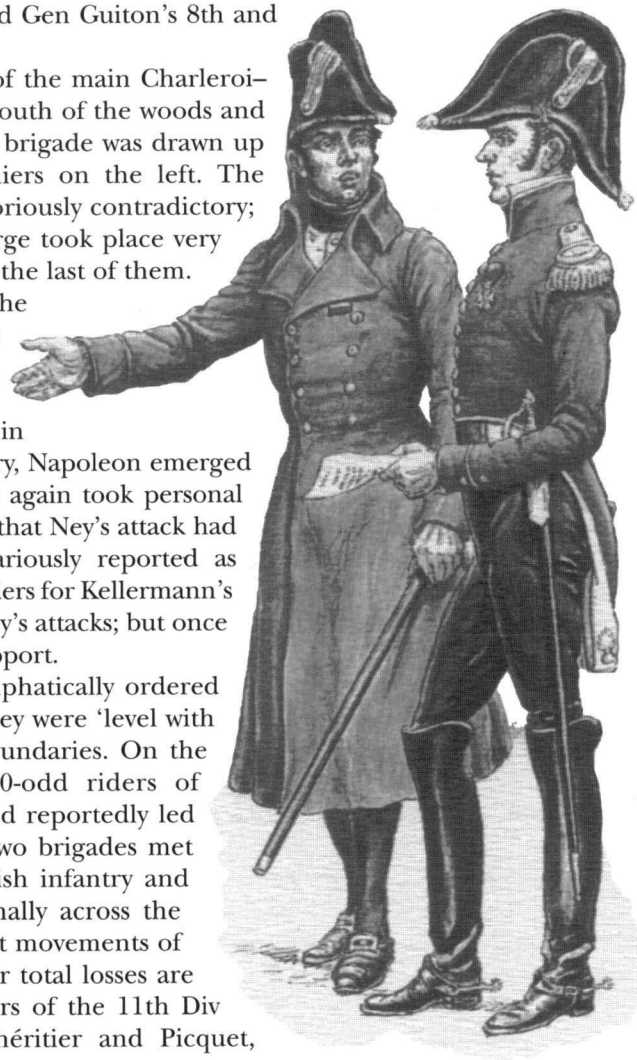
When Napoleon landed in March 1815 his journey from the south coast to Paris, escorted at first only by his tiny Elba garrison, became a triumphal progress as troops flocked to his banner. The Bourbon monarchy fled the country, but predictably, the European powers refused to accept Napoleon's resumption of his imperial throne. As they gathered their forces around the borders of France, the Emperor struck first on 15 June, crossing into Belgium to open what became the Waterloo campaign.

The Carabiniers were not engaged in the preliminary battles, but were deployed for action on the morning of 18 June facing the British-Allied positions along Mont Saint-Jean. The 1st and 2nd Regts, under Cols Rogé and Beugnat, formed Gen Blancard's 1st Bde of Gen Roussal d'Hurbal's 12th Div, in Gen Kellermann's 3rd Corps of the Reserve Cavalry. Each regiment had three squadrons in the field; the 1st Regt totalled 32 officers and 402 rankers, with 46 and 426 horses respectively; the 2nd Regt had 30 officers and 383 men, with 41 and 373 horses. General Donop's 2nd Bde of the 12th Div consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Cuirassiers. (Kellermann's other division was Gen Lhéritier's 11th, with Gen Picquet's 2nd and 7th Dragoons, and Gen Guiton's 8th and 11th Cuirassiers.)

The 12th Div was posted well to the west of the main Charleroi–Brussels road, behind Gen Foy's 9th Inf Div, south of the woods and orchard of Hougoumont. Donop's Cuirassier brigade was drawn up on the right (east) and Blancard's Carabiniers on the left. The relative timings of events at Waterloo are notoriously contradictory; but we can be sure that the Carabiniers' charge took place very late in the cavalry attacks, and may have been the last of them.

Marshal Ney's initial ill-judged attack on the Allied squares by unsupported cavalry was carried out by the 4th Cavalry Corps, followed by the Light Cavalry of the Guard. When these had spent themselves, and were withdrawing in the face of counter-charges by the Allied cavalry, Napoleon emerged from his bout of illness or lethargy, and once again took personal command, reportedly complaining to his staff that Ney's attack had been an hour premature. At some time variously reported as anything between 4pm and 5.30pm, he sent orders for Kellermann's 3rd Cavalry Corps to advance and reinforce Ney's attacks; but once again, no infantry were ordered forward in support.

Kellermann led his corps forward, but emphatically ordered Blancard to halt with his Carabiniers when they were 'level with Hougoumont' – presumably, its southern boundaries. On the slope Ney met Kellermann and his 2,700-odd riders of Picquet's, Guiton's and Donop's brigades, and reportedly led them into the attack in person. Lhéritier's two brigades met with the usual fate at the hands of the British infantry and guns and were diverted to the right, diagonally across the Allied front towards La Haye Sainte; the exact movements of Donop's Cuirassier brigade are unclear. Their total losses are unknown, but were heavy; among the officers of the 11th Div killed or seriously wounded were Gens Lhéritier and Picquet,



Officer in winter undress uniform with overcoat, and senior officer in winter *petit tenue de ville*, c1810. Off duty, the officer on the left wears his bicorn. With the comfortable sky-blue double-breasted overcoat he wears black stockings for winter, and black shoes with silver buckles. On the right, his senior colleague wears a sky-blue single-breasted uniform coat with collar and cuffs in the same colour piped silver, and white turnbacks. For winter he wears dark blue trousers and the traditional heavy cavalry boots, and an épée is frogged to a belt passing under his clothing. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)

Col Léopold and 29 other Dragoon officers, Gen Guiton, Col Courtier and 20 other Cuirassier officers. In the 12th Div, Gens Roussal d'Hurbal and Donop, Cols Grandjean and Lacroix, and 28 other officers became casualties.

The Line cavalry of the 3rd Corps were followed up the slopes, in their turn, by Gen Guyot's Heavy Cavalry of the Guard – though the exact chain of command responsibility for this attack is still disputed. These units made three separate charges, with the usual lack of success. These later sequences of charges by the whole Reserve Cavalry (except the Carabiniers) – 63 squadrons, totalling perhaps 9,000 men – are vividly described by eye-witnesses, but the details are confused.

At some time around 5.30–6pm, while the charges of the Guard Dragoons and Mounted Grenadiers were in the process of petering out in exhausted frustration, an infantry attack was mounted east of the Hougoumont woods and enclosures, by the divisions of Gens Bachelu and Foy. These troops were repulsed by heavy fire from Allied batteries and the squares of Adam's light infantry brigade – notably the 71st and 52nd Regiments – which had been brought forward into the front line behind the north-east corner of the Hougoumont orchard. It was at about the same time or slightly later that the Carabinier brigade was thrown into an attack against the same British squares.

Sitting their horses patiently, in their gleaming brass armour and scarlet-crested helmets, Gen Blancard's regiments were bound to attract the eyes of Marshal Ney as he looked around wildly for ever more men to invest in his failed gamble. General Kellermann later wrote that he had sent word to stop them, but was too late. They were overlooked from the first by the British infantry and guns on the crest, which in 1815 dominated the slope more sharply than it has done since the later erection of the Lion Mound (the eyewitness Capt de Brack, of the Red Lancers, compared it to the gallery of an amphitheatre overlooking the arena). In obedience to the marshal's unquestionable orders they started to walk their heavy horses forward on to the slope – deep in mud, torn up by innumerable hooves, and encumbered by dead and dying horses and men.

Gradually warming up their mounts as they moved to a trot and a canter, the Carabiniers picked up speed in the last few dozen yards, and drove up to and between the enemy squares. Unable, like all previous charges, to break the infantry's resistance, they were fired upon from all sides, notably by the 71st Light Infantry at their front and the 52nd on their right. Capt de Brack would write: '...The Carabinier brigade emerged on our right at a gentle trot and, in column of troops, crossed the arena alone, and rode all along the enemy batteries to attack the British right. Then Wellington's musketry and cannon fire broke out together, to strike together at the same target, and mixed with the thunder of their firing [we heard] three butcher's cheers. In a few moments, by death or flight, the Carabiniers had vanished.'

Charging Carabiniers in full dress, 1810–15. Carabiniers were traditionally mounted on large black horses of Norman or Flemish breeds; but despite their strength, their final charge at Waterloo was robbed of its full impact by having to attack up a muddy slope that had been repeatedly churned up by thousands of other horsemen for hours beforehand, and was obstructed with masses of fallen horses and men. Their corps commander Gen Kellermann would later write that he tried in vain to prevent Marshal Ney committing this last reserve to his failed attacks; and that 'half of the brigade was laid low' by the British musketry and artillery. (Courtesy Hermann-Historica, oHG, Munich, Germany)

OPPOSITE **Interesting reconstruction of a Carabinier wearing a cuirass as early as 1802. Support for it survives in a letter written by Gen Gassendi on 23 June 1802, in which he mentions that some newly made cuirasses for the Cuirassiers were sent to the Carabiniers while they were serving in the Army of the Rhine. (Illustration by Pierre Benigni, *Le Bivouac*)**

General Blancard was wounded once again, and Col Rogé, commander of the 1st Regt, had his horse killed under him; he was rescued and taken to safety by his men. Another wounded officer was Capt Marcéau, who had saved the regimental eagle at Borodino.

Sadly, the Carabiniers would also earn a footnote in the history of Waterloo by another act – an act of treachery – supposedly at the critical moment when Napoleon was preparing to send his Imperial Guard infantry into the battle in the hope of breaking Wellington's line before the approaching Prussians overwhelmed the French right flank. An officer of the 2nd Carabiniers, Capt du Barail, left the French lines under the pretext of a reconnaissance; when his companions would go no further, he suddenly clapped spurs to his horse and galloped across to the Allied lines, shouting *'Vive le Roi!'* He told LtCol Colborne of the 52nd, the artillery commander Sir Augustus Fraser, and Maj Blair of Adam's brigade staff to inform Wellington of the impending attack by the Imperial Guard. In fact this defector told the British nothing that they could not have predicted for themselves.

The total losses of the Reserve Cavalry are not recorded, but were estimated by Adolphe Thiers (1862) at 4,000 men. Charras (1869) wrote that Ney lost one-third of his men and horses, that many of those who returned were on foot, and that the remainder were capable of little more that day. Though beaten at Waterloo, the Carabiniers still fought a few rearguard actions in defence of their country. At Souvenans they sabred their way through the Austrian infantry, and at Chevremont they did the same to the Russians. Rallying at Reims, they learned of Napoleon's second abdication.

Under the Second Restoration the new reductions in the army would also affect the Carabiniers this time, but they would survive. An ordnance of 16 July 1815 reorganized them into a single regiment, one more under the name of Carabiniers de Monsieur. Many years later, under the Second Empire, their dream of joining the Imperial Guard would come true.

UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT

The pre-1810 uniform

The bearskin cap was fixed by a decree of 26 October 1801: 31.8cm (12.72in) tall, it should have had scarlet wool cords plaited into flounders, and tasselled at each end, but in fact it seems that the Carabiniers never adopted these, keeping their white cords as per the 1791 regulations. The top of the busby at the back was covered with a round piece of scarlet felt cloth decorated with white crossed stripes.

The dark blue full dress *habit* coat had a straight standing collar of the same blue, edged with scarlet piping. The cuffs were scarlet piped with blue; from 1791 the two regiments were distinguished only by the cuff flaps, those of the 1st Regt being scarlet with blue piping, and those of the 2nd being in reversed colours. The 'cutaway' scarlet lapels had seven small buttons down each outer edge, and three larger ones continued the line below the right lapel. The

This portrait of Cpl Marteau of the 1st Carabiniers clearly dates from after Ratisbonne in 1809, since the bearskin is fitted with chin scales. Note the white edging to the strap of his red epaulette, the white *bride* edged with red, the crossed white braid on the red top patch of his bearskin, the red plume and the white tasselled cord with two flounders.

horizontal false pockets were decorated with three large buttons and scarlet piping. All buttons were of white metal, showing a grenade motif. The turnbacks were scarlet, decorated with blue grenade badges – these latter became white from 1808 onwards. The scarlet epaulettes are shown in various sources both without and with white edging all round the straps; their securing loops (*'brides'*) were supposed to be white edged with scarlet.

For most types of duties the full dress *habit* was replaced with a single-breasted dark blue *surtout,* cut away high on the stomach like the full dress coat. The collar and cuffs were in the same colour, piped with scarlet; the turnbacks were scarlet with blue grenades as on the full dress coat, the grenades also changing to white from 1808 onwards.

Underneath both the *habit* and *surtout* a white sleeved waistcoat was worn. Two types of breeches were issued, of off-white sheep's leather and of canvas. The latter fastened from top to bottom up the sides with bone buttons, and were generally worn over the leather breeches on campaign as protection. Tall heavy-cavalry riding boots of black leather were worn, with knee flaps and strapped-on white metal spurs. White-cuffed gauntlets completed the uniform.

Rank distinctions Rank stripes were in white wool or silver braid edged with red, placed diagonally on both forearms of the coat. Length-of-service chevrons were made of scarlet wool or red-edged silver braid and placed on the left upper arm. Corporals wore two white stripes edged with red, and red service chevrons. Sergeants were distinguished by one silver stripe edged with red; their epaulettes and sword knot tassels were of red mixed with silver, their service chevrons silver edged with red. Sergeant-majors displayed two silver stripes edged with red; epaulettes and sword knot tassels were red mixed with silver, and service chevrons silver edged with red. **Trumpeters** wore coats in reversed colours, i.e. red faced and piped with blue and braided with white.

Weapons The waist belt for the sword and the diagonal pouch belt were dyed ochre-yellow edged with white stripes. The cavalry cartridge pouch, holding 16 rounds and measuring about 24cm x 16cm, was in black leather with a brass grenade on the flap. Carabiniers were armed with straight-bladed An IX or An XI sabres, with a special brass guard with three bars and a shell showing a grenade motif; the scabbard was of black leather with brass furniture, carried frogged at a slant from the left hip. (It seems that these weapons were ordered at regimental expense rather than by government contract.) A black sword knot (fist strap) with a red tassel was another Carabinier distinction.

As well as a pair of An IX or An XIII pistols in saddle holsters (if they could get two – often only single pistols were issued to cavalry during the Empire), they probably carried the An IX or An XIII Dragoon pattern musket, measuring 1.46m or 1.41m respectively, or possibly the 1.30m An IX Artillery pattern. The pictorial and documentary sources are imprecise or contradictory; but the cavalry musketoon of An IX, clipped to a shoulder belt, does not seem to have been general issue before 1812. In action the musket was carried slung; at other times it is shown (e.g. by Martinet and others, in c1808–09) secured in dragoon fashion to the right side of the saddle, its butt forwards in a leather 'bucket' hanging on the horse's shoulder below the pistol holster, its barrel slanting up and back outside the trooper's right leg and secured to the

saddle behind it by a loop of strap. The bayonet was carried frogged vertically to the sword belt at the left hip.

Stable dress included a blue fatigue cap – *bonnet de police 'à la dragonne'* – piped red, with a broad white band around the top of the 'turban', a white tassel at the tip of the tucked-in 'flame' hanging over the front edge of the turban, and a white grenade badge on the front. A double-breasted blue cloth stable jacket was worn with fatigue trousers in white or blue linen.

The Carabiniers wore a sleeveless **riding mantle** made from cloth of a white/blue mixed weave – giving a light blue-grey appearance – with red lining showing at the front; this had a standing collar and a shoulder cape. When not worn this *manteau* was rolled and placed on top of the portmanteau. The latter was dark blue, edged with white and displaying a white grenade at both ends; it was initially cylindrical in shape, but changed to a rectangular version from about 1808. A white sheepskin saddle cover, with 'vandyke' or 'wolf's-tooth' edging of red cloth, was worn over a dark blue half-shabraque (saddle cloth) with white grenades in the squared corners, and edged with white braid.

Officers' uniforms were essentially the same as those of the troops but more finely tailored using higher quality materials. Their buttons were silvered; their special pattern epaulettes with embroidered grenades, epaulette loops, the grenades on their coat turnbacks, their cap cords and tassels, and the edging of their ochre belts were all of silver metallic braid and embroidery. Company grade officers wore a scarlet cap plume, field grade or staff officers wore white. The officers' riding mantle was dark blue with red lining at the front, edged in silver.

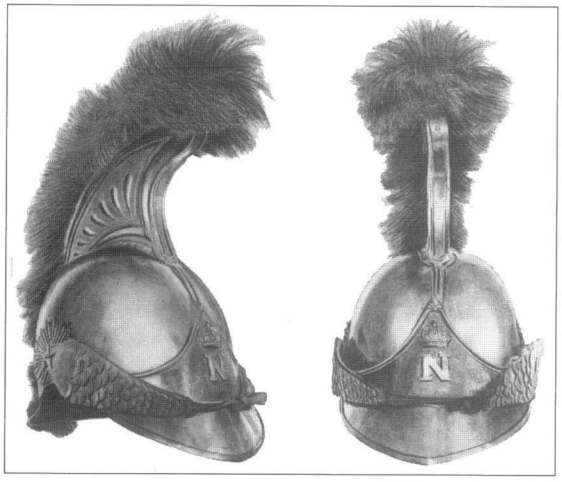
Portrait of a trumpet-major of either Carabiniers or Cuirassiers between 1796 and 1806, displaying the old-fashioned powdered hairstyle – cropped at the top, long over the ears, and tied into a long pigtail at the back. He wears a single-breasted dark blue coat, with double silver braid stripes edging his collar inside a line of scarlet piping. His epaulette strap shows a narrow red centre between broad silver braid edges, a silver *bride*, a silver pad with a radial effect, and intermixed silver and scarlet crescent and fringe. (Author's collection)

The 1810 uniform

The **helmet** was made of yellow brass and decorated with a frontal band in white metal, ending at the bosses for the chin scales; a brass crowned 'N' was placed centrally on this band, which was swept up into a point below the front of the comb. A narrower white metal band continued from behind the chin scale bosses around the rear base of the skull. The front peak had an edge binding of brass, the rear neck guard an edging of white metal. The brass comb or crest was decorated with fluting, and bore a large red *chenille* ('caterpillar') of padded horsehair. The white metal chin scales consisted of 16 rows, fixed to leather straps; the white metal bosses were of a rayed sunburst design with a brass five-point star in the centre.

The steel **cuirass** had a yellow brass plate soldered to its surfaces, but leaving a 25mm bare steel border all round, embellished with brass rivets. The breast and back plates were held together by a belt of natural leather with a brass buckle, and by two leather shoulder straps protected by brass scales, terminating in brass plates pierced with two fixing holes for studs. Troopers had no emblem on the breastplate. The inside of the breastplate was padded with strong cloth stuffed with horsehair; the edges of this lining protruded above, below and in the armholes of the cuirass, showing dark blue with a line of white edging.

The short-tailed, single-breasted **jacket** was white, with a straight standing collar and cuffs of sky-blue piped with white. The front edge of



Trooper's brass helmet, showing details of the upswept comb and *chenille*, and the crowned cypher 'N' on the white metal frontal plate. (Author's collection)

the jacket was piped sky-blue; the turnbacks were sky-blue and were decorated with white woven grenades. Vertical false pockets were simulated with sky-blue piping and decorated with three large buttons. Epaulettes were scarlet with a white braid edging all round the top of the strap, and secured by white loops and small buttons. Once more, the two regiments were distinguishable only by the cuffs: the 1st Regt had white cuff flaps piped with sky-blue, and the 2nd Regt sky-blue flaps piped with white.

The white hide breeches, with a front flap, were of the standard heavy cavalry type. On campaign they were usually protected by brown or grey overalls buttoned over them. Boots, gauntlets and belt equipment were unchanged.

Rank distinctions were in white or silver edged or mixed with sky-blue; service chevrons were in red for troopers and corporals, and silver edged with sky-blue for NCOs. The latter wore neither the cartridge pouch nor the musketoon belt. **Trumpeters** probably wore sky-blue jackets with white facings and braid, white epaulettes and white *chenilles* on their helmets (see Plate G).

Weapons The special regimental pattern sabre was presumably retained by those who had them, but from 1810 plainer weapons with three-bar brass guards were issued; models included both straight blades in steel An XI Dragoon scabbards, and slightly curved blades in steel or leather scabbards. The latter became the norm from 1813, and some individuals seem to have had their old style Carabinier guards transferred to the new weapons. The sword knot changed from black to whitened leather.

A trooper's brass-hilted Carabinier sabre, showing the shell embossed with a grenade. The scabbard is of black leather with brass fittings. (Author's collection)

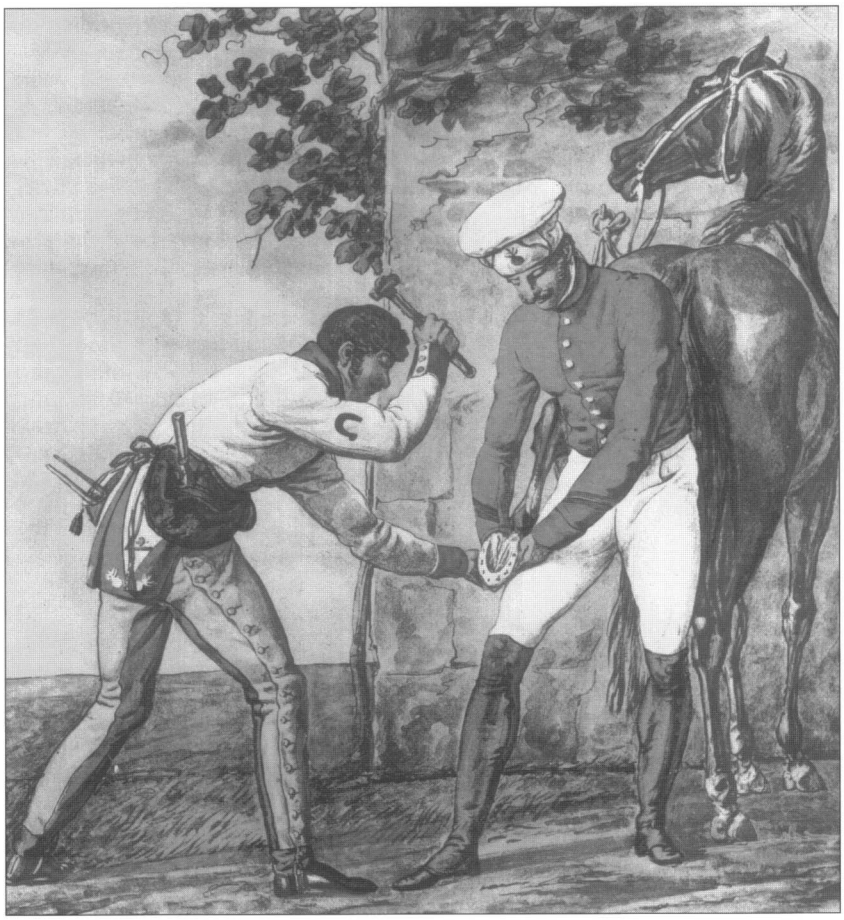
At first the Carabiniers were armed only with their sabre and pistols, but from 1812 onwards they received the newly issued An IX model cavalry musketoon, 1.15cm long and recognizable by the forward end of the barrel protruding well beyond the short wooden forestock. In action this was attached by a spring hook and swivel to an extra shoulder belt – also in ochre with white edging – worn over the pouch belt and secured to it by a stud. When not in use the musketoon was secured muzzle down to the right side of the saddle, with a strap round the small of the butt and a leather 'bucket' for the muzzle.

A white sleeveless **riding mantle** with a half-cape had sky-blue edging and lining. The Carabiniers' horses were black for the troops and officers and grey for the trumpeters. The plain leather saddle and pistol holsters were covered with a white sheepskin edged with sky-blue vandyking. The sky-blue half-shabraque showing behind and below this was edged with two white braid stripes – a narrow inside a broad stripe – and decorated with white grenades in the rear corners. A sky-blue portmanteau, seen in both cylindrical and rectangular models, showed white edging and a white grenade at each end.

Officers' uniforms were basically the same, but again more finely made of better quality materials, with silver buttons, epaulettes and other distinctions, including silver braid borders on the caped riding mantle. Their breeches and gloves were of buckskin. Their helmets and cuirasses showed a redder, more copper-rich alloy than those of the troops, with silvered furniture and distinctions. Their breastplates bore a silver rayed sunburst decoration with a star in the centre, like the chin scale bosses.

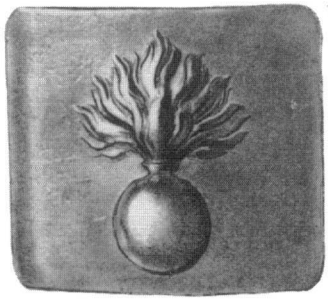
1812 Bardin modifications

In 1812 other modifications to the 1810 regulations were issued; effective from 1813 onwards, many of these merely ratified existing uniform practices, and for the Carabiniers the changes were probably minimal. The jacket cuffs were to be red for the 1st Regt, remaining sky-blue for the 2nd; both regiments henceforth had sky-blue cuff flaps with white piping. The white waistcoat was to be sleeveless, and the overalls of grey cloth. The blue stable jacket had a single, rather than two rows of buttons, and a side pocket; and the old 'nightcap' *bonnet de police* was to be replaced with the 1812 *pokalem* type, in white with sky-blue piping and badge. The grenade on the ends of the portmanteau was to be replaced with a regimental number, and the shabraque edging was to be a single wide stripe.

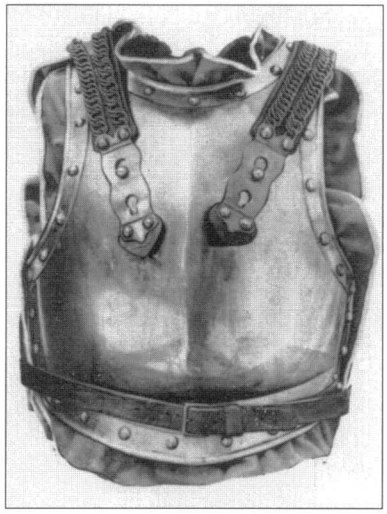


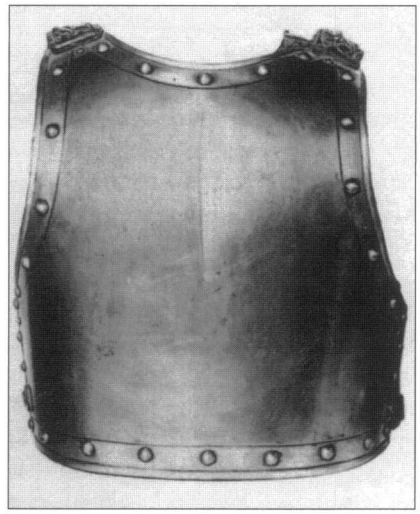
ABOVE **A drawing of the white 'pokalem', with sky-blue badge and piping around the front and ear flaps. (Author's collection)**

LEFT **Vernet painting of a farrier of the 1st Regt in *tenue de route*, and a corporal in stable jacket and 'pokalem' fatigue cap, according to the 1812 Bardin reforms. The farrier's white jacket shows a sky-blue collar, the red cuffs introduced for the 1st Carabiniers by Bardin, and the red horseshoe of his trade. Note his buttoned grey campaign overalls reinforced with black leather; and two black tool bags tied at his waist. The corporal wears his sky-blue single-breasted stable jacket with white breeches and black gaiters. His rank stripes are shown as red, although regulations called for white edged with sky-blue.**



ABOVE **A trooper's brass waist belt plate with grenade badge. (Author's collection)**





RIGHT **Breast- and back plates of a trooper's brass-plated steel cuirass. (Author's collection)**

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archives in the library of the Belgian Royal Army Museum, Brussels

Le Manuscrit des Carabiniers, Librairie Bruno Sepulchre (Paris, 1989)

Bué, Capitaine, *Livre d'Or des Carabiniers* (Paris, 1898)

Coppens, Bernard, & P.Courcelle, *Hougoumont – Waterloo 1815, Les Carnets de la Campagne No.1,* Editions de la Belle Alliance (Brussels, 1999)

Margerand, J., *Les Cuirasses des Carabiniers* (Paris, 1911)

Tondeur, Jean-Philippe, et al., *Les Vertes Bornes: Les Grandes Charges de la Cavalerie Francaise – Waterloo 1815, Les Carnets de la Campagne No.5,* Editions de la Belle Alliance (Brussels, 2002)

Bulletins and journals: *Le Passepoil, La Giberne, Uniformes, Tradition, Costumes et Uniformes* (France, various dates)

A fine example of an officer's helmet with its original box. The skull is copper red; the comb is gilt, as are the star on the silver sunburst rosettes, and the crown and 'N' on the highly decorative silver front plate. The silver-scaled chin straps are tied together with tasselled gold cords. (Courtesy Piasa, Paris)

THE PLATES

A: 1791–94
A1: Carabinier
A2: Trumpeter
A3: Officer

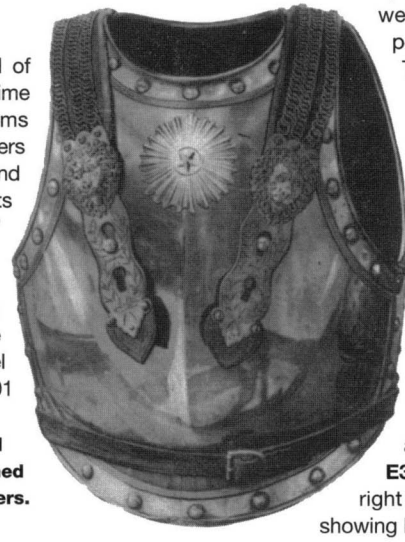
All three figures are reconstructed after dress regulations and period engravings. The trumpeter **A2** wears the standard regimental uniform but with white-and-red lace on the sleeves, cuffs, lapels, pockets and shoulders; this, in combination with the blue coat, gives the national colours of revolutionary France. The turnback grenades are still blue; and note the details of his sabre. The powdered and queued hairstyle of all these figures is still very much '*ancien régime*'. The bearskin cap is of a model with upswept fur and a leather front peak. The horses were mainly black or bays (brown horses with black manes, tails, and legs below the knees), but trumpeters rode greys. The troopers' saddlery is of the standard French heavy cavalry pattern; that of the officer **A3** is of a more personal taste, and includes a large shabraque edged with red cloth.

B: REVOLUTIONARY WARS, 1790s
B1, 2 & 3: Carabiniers

This period was marked by shortages of uniforms and equipment, and soldiers laid hands on anything they could find, on the battlefield and elsewhere, to more or less complete their inadequate government issues. The brown bearskin worn by one trooper (**B1** – after a contemporary German document) – still bears a plate with the former royal motif, and the fur dressed to sweep upwards; he wears 'ducksfoot'-shaped shoulder straps instead of epaulettes, and his carbine is slung over his shoulder on a length of rope. Another trooper (**B3** – after Seele) wears an adapted infantry coat; both he and the third (**B2** – after Mellinet) have greyish overalls with a yellow stripe down the buttoned outseam. Saddlery is simplified, and a mixture of French and captured Austrian equipment is used.

C: CONSULATE & EMPIRE, 1804–05
C1: Louis Bonaparte, Colonel-General of Carabiniers
C2, C3: Officers
C4: Carabinier

The Consulate was a prosperous period of relative peace, when elite regiments had time and money to spend on their uniforms and equipment. The 'royalist' Carabiniers returned to their *ancien régime* hairstyles and uniforms, and officers ordered their coats decorated with silver 'brandenbourgs' around the buttonholes; **C2, C3 & C4** are all reconstructed after Hofmann. The bearskin caps were now dressed with the fur combed downwards, but were still shown as being of a lower model than those specified in the October 1801 regulations, which would soon appear. Napoleon's younger brother Louis Bonaparte (**C1** – after Ysabey), the future King of Holland, was named as the Colonel-General of the Carabinier branch; for Napoleon's coronation as Emperor in 1804 he wore this regimental uniform with massive silver embroidery, aiguillettes, and the sash of the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour.



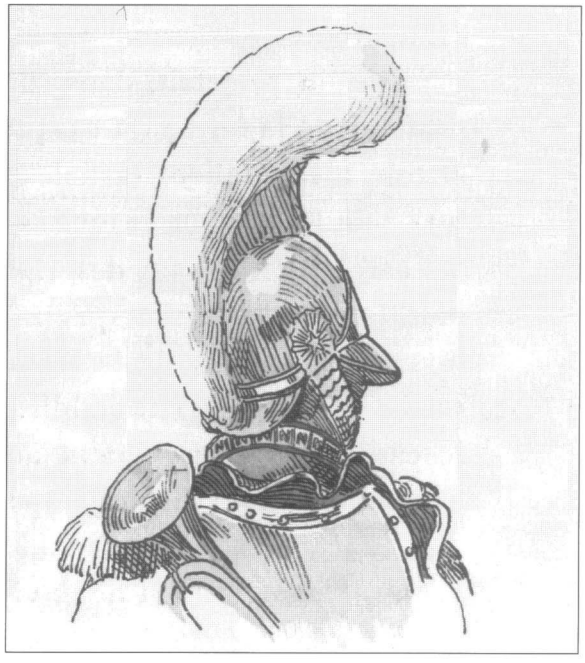
Officer's red copper cuirass, with silvered 'sunburst' badge; note also the extra turned edge on the inside of the bare steel borders. (Author's collection)

D: THE EARLY EMPIRE, 1806–10
D1: Officer in service dress
D2: Trumpeter in parade dress
D3: Carabinier in parade dress

All these figures are reconstructed after dress regulations and period engravings. The traditional style of Carabinier uniform is still worn, but by now, following fashion, the cut is more closely fitting, the bearskin caps are taller, and the hair powder has finally been discontinued. The bearskins – inadequately secured to the head by a leather strap passing under the pigtail at the back of the head – are still dressed with white cords, despite the change to red in the 1801 regulations; only the officer **D1** has yet acquired a long attachment cord passing under his epaulette to a coat buttonhole, to prevent his cap being lost in battle. The trumpeter **D2** wears a regimental uniform in reversed colours laced and decorated with white, including dark blue epaulettes. Note that **D3** carries his Dragoon musket with the butt forwards and down in a leather 'bucket', the barrel secured by a strap.

E: CAMPAIGN DRESS, 1806–10
E1: Officer
E2: Trumpeter
E3: Carabinier

The officer (**E1** – after a contemporary picture) wears what appears to be a trooper's coat, to which he has added the silver epaulettes (thinly fringed on left, fringeless counter-epaulette on right) of his subaltern status. His shabraque is drawn out into rear points decorated with silver tassels – certainly an extravagance that only officers could afford. The trumpeter (**E2** – after dress regulations and contemporary paintings) is again in reversed colours; but both he and the trooper (**E3** – after a contemporary painting) wear the single-breasted surtout, very popular within the Carabinier regiments. The trumpeter's is scarlet, lined and piped dark blue, with white epaulettes and grenade badges; the trooper's is dark blue, lined and piped scarlet, with white grenade badges, and white braid edging the straps of the scarlet epaulettes. The officer and trumpeter both wear 'baggy' dark blue trousers noticeably more loosely cut than the trooper's overalls. The metal chin scales added to the bearskin caps indicate that these uniforms were worn in or after 1809, when this feature was ordered in Vienna; and all three figures have attachment cords on their caps. Note that **E3** has his musket fixed butt forward on the right side of his saddle, its 'bucket' just showing beyond his mount's shoulder.



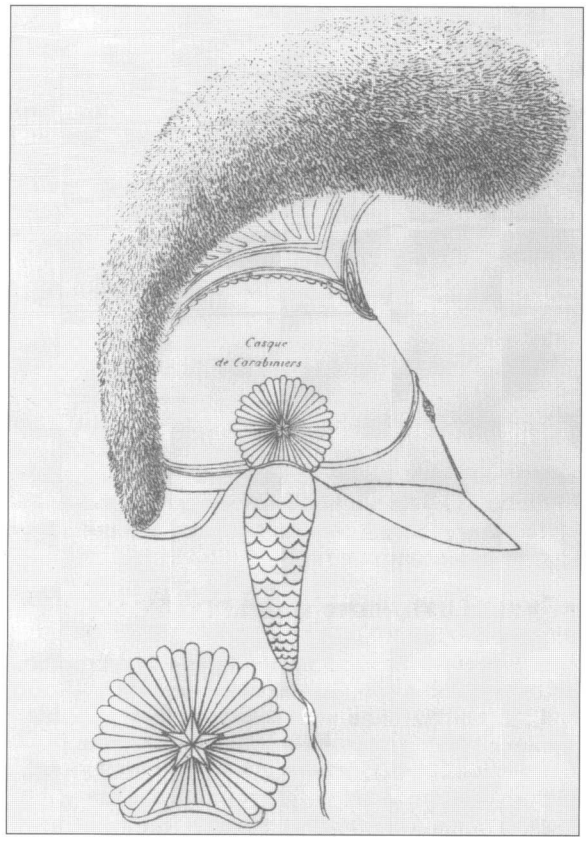
Carabinier trumpeter, as recommended by Bardin in 1812; compare with Plate H1. The helmet has a white *chenille*; and the sky-blue collar is edged with the 'imperial livery' braid, of green-on-yellow alternating crowned 'Ns' and eagles, edged with red. More than one artist shows the trumpeters wearing cuirasses; this would seem entirely sensible on campaign, but no documentary proof for the practice has yet been found. (Author's collection)

F: PARADE DRESS, 1810–15

F1: Field officer

F2 & F3: Carabiniers

During 1810 the Carabiniers received their new uniforms and armour, ordered by Napoleon's decree of 24 December 1809; all these figures are reconstructed from the regulations and from contemporary pictures. (The armour was not at first popular: it was not only uncomfortably heavy, and needed constant polishing – it was also seen as an insult to their bravery.) The major or colonel **F1** wears a helmet skull and cuirass of a coppery red shade, contrasting with the yellower brass alloy of his helmet comb. Otherwise his officer status is most obviously marked by the silvered sunburst decoration on his breastplate, with a central copper star; and by the silver or silver-plated fittings and decorations of his uniform and equipment. Note the double silver braid edging to his cuirass lining, and the double silver chains on its blue-faced shoulder straps. As a field officer he wears a pair of epaulettes with thick fringes. The officer's saddle is recognizable by the special Carabinier lace edging, and the fur holster covers. **F2 & F3** illustrate the paler brass helmet and armour of the enlisted ranks; note also the newly issued musketoon carried muzzle down on the right side of the saddle, hanging from the second belt worn over the pouch belt; the pouch, heavy with cartridges, resting on the portmanteau; the bayonet frogged to the sword belt on the left hip; and the straight-bladed sabre with a plain three-bar guard, carried in a steel scabbard. The white riding cloak on top of the portmanteau is folded to show its partial sky-blue lining.



G: TRUMPETERS & DRUMMER, 1810–14

G1: Trumpeter, 1810

G2: Kettle drummer, 1810–14

G3: Trumpeter, 1810–13

The uniforms of regimental trumpeters of Napoleon's armies, and to an even greater extent those of the musicians of each unit's *tête de colonne*, are often variously illustrated and described in pictorial and documentary sources. In an age when absolute uniformity and adherence to regulations was seldom rigidly enforced, these uniforms still offered some of their historic opportunities for special display, according to unit custom and the wealth of the officers. With the introduction of the new white and sky-blue Carabinier uniform a number of choices seem to have been put forward and tried out. One was this red coat (**G1** – after Rousselot in 'Le Passepoil'), faced and lined dark blue and laced white, including tasselled bars across the chest, and worn with the old bearskin cap. To whatever extent this was adopted, it was soon dropped in favour of a more conventional *surtout* in sky-blue faced, lined and laced white (**G3** – after the famous collection of 'cardboard toy soldiers of Strasbourg'), with plain lace bars across the chest, and worn with a white-crested helmet. Some contemporary illustrations also show trumpeters wearing a cuirass. Like every elite mounted corps the Carabinier regiments also had a mounted kettle drummer for parading on special occasions; **G2** is reconstructed after dress regulations.

OPPOSITE **Detail drawings of the Carabinier helmet according to Bardin, the officer entrusted with writing the new 1812 dress regulations for the French Army. This profile clearly shows the dramatically 'classical' shape, with the comb set far back on the back-swept skull and the *chenille* crest protruding far forwards. (Author's collection)**

Vernet painting of a trooper and officer of the 2nd Regt; after the 1812 Bardin reforms the 2nd Carabiniers were identifiable by sky-blue cuffs, the 1st by red cuffs, both with sky-blue flaps. The trooper – here wearing black gaiters for dismounted duty – shows clearly how the An IX musketoon was hooked to a second shoulder belt over the pouch belt. Armed with this carbine, a heavy sabre, a bayonet and two pistols, and wearing armour, the Carabiniers – like the Cuirassiers – could be considered as the 'tanks' of Napoleon's time. (Author's collection)

H: CAMPAIGN DRESS, 1813–15

H1: Trumpeter

H2: Carabinier

H3: Officer

All these figures are reconstructed after dress regulations and contemporary sources. In 1812, after several unsuccessful attempts to temper regimental excesses in the dress for drummers and trumpeters particularly, Napoleon ordered a new regulation uniform for them. For the first time regiments had to adopt the 'Imperial Livery': a green uniform with chevrons and bands of yellow-green-red lace on the sleeves, cuffs, collars, tails and around the buttons on the chest. In this uniform, worn from 1813 onwards, **H1** retains the Carabiniers' sky-blue collar, cuffs and piping. Another distinction is the white 'caterpillar' crest on the helmet, though this was sometimes also represented as sky-blue.

The white uniforms of the Carabiniers were so prone to dirt when in the field that replacements for campaign use were apparently adopted. More than one contemporary artist (e.g. Albrecht Adam during the Russian campaign) shows Carabiniers in blue uniforms of a shade between sky-blue and the normal French blue – see **H2**, a trooper at Waterloo, after contemporary pictures. We know that other cavalry regiments replaced their full dress uniforms when on campaign, so it is plausible that the Carabiniers did the same. Alternatively they wore their stable jackets or undress uniforms of that colour. The Waterloo campaign was characterized by a number of transitional uniform features. All royalist emblems had to be removed, yet since there was practically no time to replace them with imperial equivalents soldiers often wore neither – e.g. this trooper has no helmet insignia. Note his red grenade turnback badge; and the old- style shell guard and black sword knot attached to his new- style curved sabre.

The mounted officer **H3** also wears a substitute campaign uniform, here a long-tailed mid-blue coat, under his copper-red cuirass; but when the Emperor was present and commanding in person the officers were supposed to wear their white full dress uniforms in the field. Note that his helmet comb is made from the same copper-coloured alloy as the skull; and the long red horsehair mane hanging below his chenille – this gave some extra protection against cuts, as well as being decorative.

INDEX

Figures in **bold** refer to illustrations.

Abbeel, Joseph
  eyewitness accounts 9, 12–13
Abensberg, battle of 11
Alexander I, Tsar of Russia 10, 11, 15
Amiens, Treaty of 5, 6
'Army of the Coasts of the Ocean' 6
Austerlitz, battle of 7
Austrian armies 5, 6, 11, 12, 13

Barclay, General Michael 24
Bassignac, Colonel Jean de 5
Bennigsen, General Levin 9
Bernadotte, Crown Prince of Sweden 24, 33
Bessières, Marshal 11
Blancard, Colonel 8, 9, 10, 19, 20, 35, 37, 38, 39
Blücher, General Gebbard 24, 25
Borghèse, Prince Camille 7, 8, 9
Borodino, battle of 17–20

campaigns
  Napoleonic
    (1805) 6–7
    (1806–07) 8–9
    (1809) 11–13
    (1812) 15–23
    (1813) 23–4, 33–5
    (1813–14) 34–5
    (1814–15) 35–6
    Friedland 9–11
    retreat from Moscow 20–3
    as Revolutionary troops 5
    as Royalist troops 4
Carabiniers de Monsieur 4
Carabiniers du Compte de Provence 4
Carabiniers du Roi 4
Chambrotte, Sergeant Major 9
Charles, Archduke of Austria 11, 12
Coalitions against France
  Third 6–7
  Fourth 8
  Sixth 23
'Continental System' 15
cuirasses 3, **3,** 13–14, 41, **44, 45**

d'Albret, Jean 3
d'Anglars, Comte 5
d'Artois, Comte 36
Davout, Marshal Louis 11
Defrance, General 9, 11, 12

Elbing 9

Fauveau, Antoine François 3
Friedland, battle of 9–10
Friedrich Wilhelm, King of Prussia 10

helmets 41, **42, 44, 46**

Kellerman, General 37, 38
Kutuzov, General Mikail 7, 17

Lariboisère, Lieut. Ferdinand de **17, 18,** 19, **20**
Laroche, Colonel François 7, 9, 21
Les Invalides, Army Museum 3
Louis XIV, King of France 4

Mack, General Karl 6
Magdeburg garrison 34–5
Moskowa, battle of *see* Borodino, battle of
Murat, Marshal Joachim 6, 16, 20, 21, 23

Nansouty, General 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15
Napoleon Bonaparte
  and reforms of Carabinier Regiments 5–6
  return from Elba exile 37–9
Neerwinden, battle of 4
Ney, Marshal Michel 3, 37, 38, 39

Peninsular War 11
Portugal 10
Pressburg, Treaty of 7

rank distinctions 40, 42
Régiment Piquet 21, 22
regimental organisation
  at battle of Hochstaedt **6**
  Colonels of regiment 11
  at first restoration 36
  and French Revolution 4–6
  and Napoleon 8
  origins 3–4
Rillet, S/Lieutenant
  eye witness account 33, 34
Russian armies 7

Sacred Squadron 21–2
Schwarzenberg, General Karl 24, 33
Soult, Marshal Nicolas 8, 9
Spain 10–11

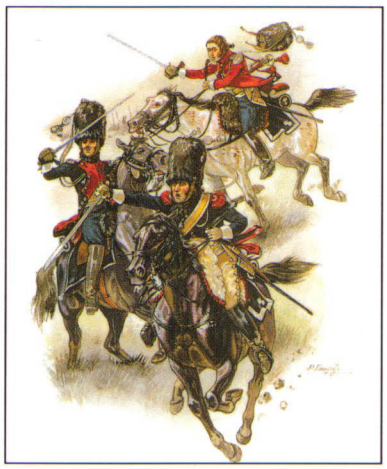
Tilsit, Peace of 10, 11

uniforms 39–44
  pre-1810 39–41
  1810 41–3
  1812 Bardin modifications 43
  carabiniers **5, 9, 13, 21, A1, B,** C4, **D3, E3, F2, F3, H2, 34, 35, 38, 39,** 45, 46, 47, **47**
  Corporal **40**
  drummers **G2,** 46
  farrier **14, 43**
  heavy cavalry **16**
  Louis Bonaparte **C1,** 45
  Napoleonic changes 13–15
  officers **12, 15, 17, A3, C2, C3, D1, E1, F1, H3, 37,** 45, 46, 47, **47**
  riding mantles **21,** 41, 42
  Sergeant **23**
  Sergeant-Major **24**
  stable dress **7,** 41
  Trumpet-major **41**
  trumpeters **4, 10, A2, D2, E2, G1, G3, H1,** 40, 42, 45, 46, 47

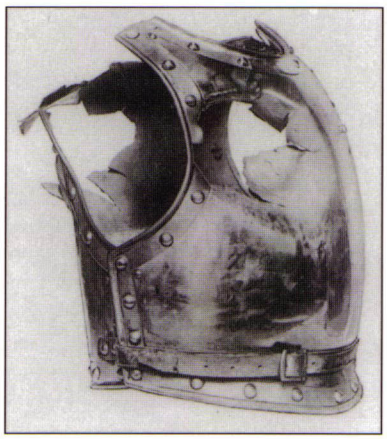
Vienna
  capture of 7, 12
Villers-en-Cauche, battle of 5

Wagram, battle of 12, 13
Waterloo, battle of 37–9
weapons 40–1, 42, **42**

The uniforms, equipment, history and organization of the world's military forces, past and present

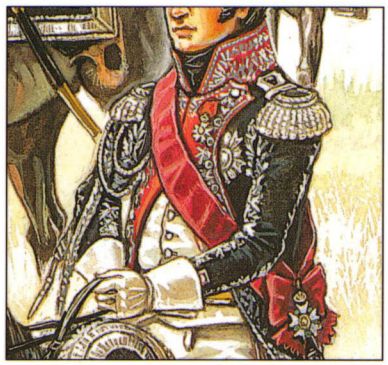


Full colour artwork



Photographs

Illustrations



Unrivalled detail

Napoleon's Carabiniers

The two privileged regiments of Carabiniers survived the French Revolution with their elite status intact. They covered themselves with glory at Austerlitz, Friedland, Ratisbonne and Wagram – where their bloody losses shocked Napoleon into ordering them new helmets and cuirasses. Re-formed after near annihilation in Russia in 1812, they fought at Leipzig and in many actions of the 1814 French campaign, and made one of the final charges at Waterloo. Illustrated with rare early prints and meticulous colour reconstructions, this book details their story, and their unique uniforms, from surviving period documents.

OSPREY PUBLISHING

www.ospreypublishing.com

ISBN 1-84176-709-3